



THE  
ADMIRAL'S  
LITTLE  
HOUSEKEEPER  
ELIZABETH·LINCOLN·GOULD





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NANCY AND MARGUERITE

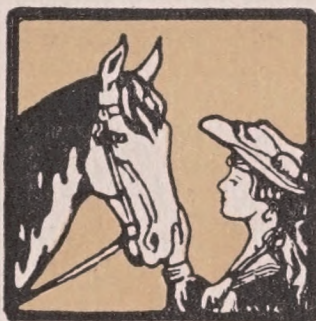


# THE ADMIRAL'S LITTLE HOUSEKEEPER

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ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY WUANITA SMITH



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## Introduction

A PREVIOUS book, "The Admiral's Granddaughter," told the story of little Nancy Beaumont, who lived at Beaumont Corners, on the old family estate, with her grandfather, the Admiral, Aunt Sylvia, her old mammy, Sylvanus, Aunt Sylvia's son, and Betty, the housemaid. She has many animal pets, chief among them "Jessie," her beautiful mare. She is ready to sell Jessie for the love of her college brother, Jack; but after all she is spared that pain, and has a happy ending to an eventful journey in a freight car.







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The Admiral’s Little Housekeeper.







# The Admiral's Little Housekeeper

## CHAPTER I

### THE COMING OF THE COMPTONS

IN the streets of Potterville the snow lay like a thick, soft carpet of white, and still the great flakes came floating down ; but the wind had blown itself away, and Mrs. Potter, looking out of one window after another, announced to her husband that the storm would soon be over.

“It's thinning out,” she said in her crisp, decided tone. “I'm glad for Nancy and the old Admiral. Leave your paper a minute, and listen to me, can't you ? Did you take in the sense of what I told you this morning ? Did you realize that it's to-night that whole Compton tribe are coming, with Jack Beaumont, to see what a country Christmas is like ? And Nancy means to show them. She has her head full of plans ; I've been some help to her, and so have others in town, but 't isn't yet time to make known what we've



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done. Did you hear me when I told you she stopped at the gate this morning, and said she and Aunt Sylvia, as she calls her, and that Betty of theirs, have been at work for days, getting ready for the company?"

"Did she stop for any special reason this morning?" asked Mr. Potter, bending his head so that his eyes were hidden.

"You know, well as I do, that I'm in the habit of stepping out now and then, with a lump of sugar for Jessie," said Mrs. Potter, her face slightly flushed. "That pleases Nancy better than a present for herself would, and she tells me the news at their house, if there is any. We call it 'The Gate Exchange,' Nancy and I."

"That's all right," and now Mr. Potter let his eyes be seen. "Any more to tell a poor man who works hard all day?"

"There's a little more," said his wife, her face relaxing into a smile. "The Admiral and Nancy drove past while you were eating supper; I heard their sleigh-bells; that was when I ran in here; you didn't ask me what 'twas; I suppose you knew I'd have to tell, before long. The Admiral seems to have taken a new lease of life this winter."

"His mind's easy about his grandson, now Jack has



## *The Coming of the Comptons* 11

buckled down to study," said Mr. Potter, "and he's let his love for Nancy, that he's hidden under that crusty manner of his, get the upper hand of him; that's why he's feeling younger."

"I believe you're right," said his wife, looking at him with considerable respect. "Nancy said that coming back from the station there'd be the General and Mrs. Compton and maybe one or two of the children in their sleigh with the Admiral, and Mr. Hobbs is to drive the rest of the party. S-sh! Isn't that the train whistle now? I thought so. High time, too—fifteen minutes late! Railroads are pretty high-handed and unreliable, according to my ideas. I made Nancy promise to wrap up warm. She isn't as rugged as some children."

While she stood close to the window which commanded a view of the road the sleighs must take from the station, blowing on the panes of glass to keep them clear, Nancy Beaumont was trying to calm the old Admiral, whose patience had given way.

"They always come slowly around that last curve, grandfather," said Nancy, who was standing on the platform; "do please shut the carriage door, so you won't catch cold."

"What do you think I am, child?" demanded the Admiral. "Don't you know I drove about the country



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in an open sleigh for years before you were born? Very well. Don't you suppose I can afford to let a little air into this shut-up box on runners, without giving myself a mortal illness? Very well. I'm convinced something wrong has occurred between the bridge and—ah! run, Nancy! No, don't run! Your grandmother would not have run, but hurry ——”

This was one of the times when the thought of what her grandmother would have done did not occur to Nancy, and would have had little weight, had it come into her mind. She was running—there was no doubt about that—her curls flying—along the platform to the very end, where the passenger car always came to a standstill with a final jerk.

First came the General, lifting his hat to Nancy, and turning to give his hand to a young woman with a sweet face, who smiled down at the little girl, and put her arms on Nancy's shoulders a second later, holding her close for a warm, motherly kiss.

“Oh, to think of your being Marguerite's mother,” said Nancy softly. “You look almost like another little girl! How lovely!”

“She's not quite as young as she looks,” admonished the General, as he shook hands with Nancy when his wife had released her. “Don't you be planning to



have her coast down hill with you while I sit at home, for I won't stand it ! ”

“ Oh, Nancy, Nancy, look at me ! ” called a gay voice, and Marguerite, whirling down the car steps, seized her friend and put her arms around her as if she meant never to let her go.

“ And here we are, Nancy ! ” cried four small boys who had come tumbling out of the car and down the steps, behind Marguerite, and were now pressing close to their hostess.

“ Oh, yes, here are the boys, ” said Marguerite. “ Malcolm, and Ted, and Roger, and Dick. Make your best bows, boys. They have promised to behave just like Sunday-school, almost, they were so crazy to come ! ”

“ Oh, but I don't want them to behave too well, ” said Nancy as she shook hands with the four small boys in turn. “ I suppose Jack is in the baggage-car, seeing about your trunks. ”

“ Yes, ” said Marguerite, “ there he comes now. Boys, ” she added, turning to the row at her elbow, as Nancy ran to greet her brother, “ follow me, and I'll introduce you to the Admiral. See, he's in that carriage speaking to mother. Isn't he fine-looking, and stern ? Mind your manners now, or there'll be trouble. ”

“ I must ask you to pardon an old man's infirmity, ”



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said the Admiral, bowing his head over Mrs. Compton's hand, from his seat. "If I should rise, I might not be able to adjust myself again to these cramped quarters; but you are more than welcome; and you, too," as he wrung the General's hand. "Ah, Miss Marguerite, I am delighted to see you again, and to meet the young gentlemen."

The four little boys, standing like a short flight of steps, took off their hats and presented their small right hands, which the Admiral shook with much cordiality.

"But where's my boy?" asked the old man anxiously. "Wasn't he with you? Ah, here he comes with Nancy. They are fond of each other, those two children," he said to Mrs. Compton, in the confidential tone of one imparting a secret.

"Is everything going well with you, lad?" he asked a moment later, his keen eyes searching the handsome face of his grandson.

"Right as a trivet, sir," was Jack's reply. "Now I'll bundle all these children in with Mr. Hobbs, and take a seat beside Sylvanus—if I'm not mistaken in thinking there's a little extra room there."

"It's a most 'gregious honor for me, Mr. Jack, sir," and Sylvanus joyously moved from the middle of the seat. "I think here is a sufficiency of wrappings to



protect you from the inclementous storm, which is growing lesser all the time."

"That's right, Sylvanus, I'm glad to see you haven't lost your wonderful command of language," said Jack. "I'll be with you as soon as I have tucked in the little folks."

The sleigh from the livery stable was driven by Mr. Hobbs himself, and he shook hands warmly with Nancy's guests as she presented them.

"Snow on the ground and in the air is apt to make this pair o' horses feel pretty good and lively," said Mr. Hobbs, "and I didn't wish any accidents to occur; that new man of mine is all well enough for daylight driving, but come night I prefer to hold the reins in my own hands. How d'you do, Mr. Jack? You are looking prime."

"That's the way I'm feeling," said Jack, as he tucked the fur robes about Marguerite and Nancy.

Roger, next to the youngest, sat between the two girls, while Malcolm and Ted were one at each side of Mr. Hobbs. Mrs. Compton had taken Dick, the baby of the family, with her, as in spite of the added dignity of a late fifth birthday, he was apt to be very sleepy by six o'clock, and his mother knew that a short nap in the carriage would be a great help.



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"Suppose you give us the start," said Jack to Mr. Hobbs, in an undertone. "I'm afraid Sylvanus would not like to be left in the background, and I have a suspicion that Ezra is not as fleet of foot as in his youth."

"Certainly, Mr. Jack, anything to oblige," said Mr. Hobbs, and he waited a good five minutes after the other sleigh had started before driving out from under the roof of the Potterville station shelter.

"Now, when we go by Mrs. Potter's house—you remember her, Marguerite—we must all wave our handkerchiefs," said Nancy; "or just our hands will do; she'll be watching, and so pleased! Oh, Marguerite, and Malcolm, and Ted and Roger, I am so glad you've come! Are you half as glad you're here as I am?"

"Gladder! gladder!" cried the Comptons in a joyful chorus; and as the horses flew along the snowy road, through the main street, past Mrs. Potter's house, where two handkerchiefs fluttered at the window, out of the town, and on toward Beaumont Corners, the sleigh-bells seemed to jingle it again—"Gladder! gladder! gladder!"



## CHAPTER II

### THE WELCOME

IN the hall of the Beaumont house, on the old chest, bolt upright, in her best black gown, sat Aunt Sylvia, and on the rug, regarding her with interest, sat Julia Frost, Nancy Beaumont's Maltese cat. Tied around her neck was a ruffled collar of pink ribbon, the small bow which fastened it drooping over one of Julia's ears. She put up her paw with the idea of changing or removing this troublesome decoration, but Aunt Sylvia rebuked her sharply.

"Hyar you, Julia Frost, what you doing?" she demanded, and the cat replaced her paw on the rug and turned her head away from Aunt Sylvia. "You cert'nly are de ungratef'lest Malty cat eber I saw. Isn't I taken all ob one ebening fluting dat ribbon, and fitting it snug to yo' neck, and had to chase all ober de house to find you, fo' de tryings on—and now, when de time's come fo' you to show off befo' de visitors, seems like you's doing yo' best to take all de fresh looks out o' dat collar. S'posing it does tickle a mite? Hold yo' haid still, cyant you?"



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Aunt Sylvia slid the horn-bowed spectacles down from her cap, and arranged them at a becoming angle on her nose. Then she gazed through them at Julia Frost, who stared at her, and blinked, without moving.

"Dat's better," said Aunt Sylvia. "I reckon I'll jess keep dese glasses on to make you mind yo' manners. Dey is mighty becoming and 'pressive appearing, if de Admiral do say dey's only window glass."

She rose and stood peering at herself in the little blurred mirror which below its gay landscape scarce afforded space for the reflection of Aunt Sylvy's head with its white hair crowned with a gay turban, her last gift from Jack.

"Dat boy has got de most exc'llent tasty ideas fo' color," she said with a broad smile of satisfaction as she turned from the mirror; "he knows when folkse wear a black dress, and a mons'ous white apron, and a kerchief such as de Admiral likes to hab me wear, dey jess nachelly 'quires a little red an' yaller on dere haid, else dey looks all faded out an' gone away. Hi! you Betty! What you looking at? Don't I see a button loose on yo' waist? You come hyar to me."

Rosy-cheeked Betty presented herself meekly for inspection, but even with the aid of the horn-bowed spectacles, Aunt Sylvia was unable to find a loose



button, and at last she gave Betty a little push, and told her to go to one of the windows and see if there might be either sign or sound of the expected travelers.

“Stand so yo’ dress will mingle in wid de cyurtaings,” commanded Aunt Sylvia; “if de Admiral got de notion you’s standing at one ob de front windows, gal, spying out on him and his company, you shorely would lose yo’ place, ’less I pleaded fo’ you. Step along quick; don’ you hyar me? Is you waiting fo’ me to go, myse’f?”

Betty fled to the window, and hid herself in the long white curtains. Aunt Sylvia took her seat on the old settle by the fire, and listened, motionless. Julia Frost on the rug, purring, forgot the fretting collar for a moment. Suddenly her purr ceased; she pricked up her ears as a horse might have done, and then with a swift passage over the old oak floor, she reached the doorway; she lowered her head and putting her nose to the crack, began to make the peculiar sound, half cry and half purr, with which she always greeted her little mistress.

“Come back out’n dose windows, Betty!” called Aunt Sylvia. “Dis yer Julia Frost’s ears are sharper’n any dat’s on yo’ haid. She’s done cotch de jingle ob dose bells already, or else she done smell dose ole fur



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robes o' Hobbs's libery stable sleigh—I don't know which. Now yo' stand back o' me when de do' is opened, and you curchy to Mrs. Compton de way I taught you, and don' let me see you cotching at de furniture to keep yo' balance, now you mind. I kin tell whar dey is now; dey's almos' hyar. Julia Frost, you stan' out well, so dey see yo' collar, and rec'gnize you's done yo' best fo' de comp'ny."

With a grand flourish she threw open the door at just the proper moment, and Mrs. Compton, waved forward by the General, had for her first view a gay plaid turban which nearly touched the floor, a rosy-cheeked maid bent almost double, with arms extended and clutching the air, and a small Maltese cat with an Elizabethan ruff of pink ribbon, waving her tail in welcome, while behind this trio the great log fire sent dancing, flickering lights over the dusky hall.

"This is Nancy's Aunt Sylvia, of whom I've heard so much," said Mrs. Compton's gentle voice. "I should know you anywhere, from Marguerite's description;" and as Aunt Sylvia resumed an upright position she saw a slender gloved hand held out for her, and she clasped it between her two old palms with a glow of pride at her heart.

"And this is Betty, I'm sure," said Mrs. Compton



smiling, and that time the slender hand saved Betty from an ignominious sprawl on the floor.

"Yes, ma'am, thank you, ma'am," said Betty, rosier than ever, and retreated to the back of the hall, to be summoned again sharply by Aunt Sylvia.

"Take Miss Marguerite's bag," she commanded, as the second sleigh emptied its load at the door, "and see if de young gen'lemen has any hand baggage. I'll 'tend to Mis' Gen'l Compton's shawl-strap myself. An' how 'bout dat little teenty honey boy? Would he let Aunt Sylvy lif' him up in her arms a minute?"

Little Dick was making friends with Julia Frost, standing close to his mother, but at Aunt Sylvia's question, he looked up wonderingly at the old black face, bent to him, with such a pleading expression.

"She's my dear mammy, you know, Dick," whispered Nancy, "and if you knew how good it feels to have her lift you up!"

Julia Frost, seeing an array of boys, sprang to Nancy's shoulder, and little Dick, bereft of her society, considered the matter of Aunt Sylvia. His mother was talking to Nancy and smoothing the fur of Julia Frost, far above his reach. Near at hand was a big soft figure, inviting him to comfort; he was still half asleep.



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He yawned frankly, and smiled drowsily at the dusky face.

"You may lif' me up, Aunt Sylvy," said little Dick; and he was swung up to a shoulder so soft and yet firm and clasped by an arm so comforting and well-curved that in less time than it took Aunt Sylvia to mount the short flight of broad, shallow stairs, he was fast asleep once more.

"I'm afraid he's too heavy for you, Aunt Sylvia," said Mrs. Compton, as she followed the old mammy along the corridor till they reached a door at which Aunt Sylvia paused and stood aside to let the guest pass into the room.

"Too heavy fo' Aunt Sylvy!" echoed the musical old voice, "I reckon not, Mis' Gen'l Compton! Isn't you seen me looking at dat little honey boy de minute he come in de do', an' stood on his two little sleepy laigs, making frien's wid dat Julia Frost? My arms was jess a-twitching fo' to get him in 'em. He don' weigh more'n a bunch o' thistle-down; chillun never weighs more'n dat to Aunt Sylvy. I gets Miss Nancy in my lap often as I kin, an' she's getting to be most a young lady growed;" the dark eyes were very wistful with the last words, and Aunt Sylvia's voice had a mournful cadence.



"Oh, I think Nancy will not be a young lady for several years yet," whispered Mrs. Compton, as they tiptoed through the large room, to a small one beyond, where a little white bed gleamed through the dim light. "That is one reason I love to have Marguerite with her. Little girls grow up too fast nowadays."

She was rewarded by a flashing smile from Aunt Sylvia as the little sound-asleep boy was laid down, so gently that he scarcely stirred.

"Sleep is de mos' prettiest t'ing in dis worl'," said Aunt Sylvia, smoothing the coverlet she had drawn up over him. "Dere's plenty ob nights I steals into my lamb's room jess to see her lying so, dreaming sweet dreams. You see he'll be right close to you an' de Gen'l, in dis suite ob rooms," and she drew herself up, proudly. "De young gen'lemen is got a suite ob two rooms across de hall, an' Miss Marguerite is in her same room, nex' my Miss Nancy. And now, Mis' Gen'l Compton, I's undone yo' shawl-strap, an' I hyar de Gen'l coming, so 'tis time Aunt Sylvy took herself to de kitchen, an' when de gong tinkles, will you descend to de dining-room, if you please."

And with another courtesy, fully equal to the one with which she had welcomed the guests, Aunt Sylvia disappeared.



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A gay chatter was going on between Nancy and Marguerite as she passed their rooms, and below in the hall the Admiral stood by the fire, his hand on Jack's shoulder, listening with a smile on his stern face to some story his grandson was telling.

Aunt Sylvia stole by them, unnoticed; at the door leading out from the hall stood a small figure, all gray fur, mewling plaintively. Its pink collar was sadly askew. Aunt Sylvia picked up the little cat.

"Hyar you, Julia Frost," she whispered as they passed through the door and on to the kitchen. "You's done yo' best, but dere isn't much 'tention paid to cats, jess at first, when dere's comp'ny. You come out, an' Aunt Sylvy join you to her fam'ly in de kitchen, an' show you a saucer ob milk dat'll make you forget dere's any such t'ings as pink collars in dis whole wide world."



## CHAPTER III

### AUNT SYLVY

NEVER since the days when Nancy's father was a boy at home, had the old dining-room held such an array of youthful guests as gathered around the old table that night. The Admiral's gout was worse than usual, as a result of his unwonted exertions, but he bore its twinges bravely and smiled on all his friends, old and new.

Nancy sat opposite him, but much farther away than ever before, as two extra leaves, long unused, and warped with age and standing in a closet, had been inserted, to lengthen the table, by Aunt Sylvia and Sylvanus. It had not been easily accomplished, but when the leaves were at last in place, and the whole surface of the table had been rubbed and polished, with the aid of a few drops of oil, by Sylvanus, his mother had expressed her satisfaction.

"Yo' brain isn't anyt'ing to speak 'bout," she remarked frankly, "but yo' elbows is mighty good when I gets 'em to working, 'Vanus. When I's disposed de



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tray-cloths and such over de bad spots, dis table will look fine enough fo' de company—you'll see!"

They all saw that night, for not only were the tray-cloths "disposed" to the best advantage, but Sylvanus had been into the deep woods that afternoon and had brought back trailing pine and scarlet berries to decorate the table. An irregular wreath encircled the tall glass dish which stood in the centre and held one of Aunt Sylvia's marvelous concoctions, known as "Royal Whip," and from this wreath the pine wandered over the table, "whereber it's needed, honey," as Aunt Sylvia told Nancy, explaining her plan of decoration.

There were so many good things to eat that the eyes of the three boys grew round as saucers, and at last eight-year-old Roger could no longer restrain himself.

"Mother!" he burst out, "say, mother, did you ever eat such cake in all your life?" and then turned crimson.

Betty, standing behind Nancy's chair, cast an involuntary glance toward the door which led out to Aunt Sylvia's domain, and which stood slightly ajar. It seemed to Betty that the door moved a little, as if a foot had touched it, but Betty might have been mistaken.

"You will have to pardon him, Nancy, and Admiral



Beaumont too," said the pretty mother. "This is Roger's first taste of such cooking as Aunt Sylvia's."

That time the door surely moved, and furthermore it creaked. The Admiral's head turned toward it, and he smiled, while Nancy's dimples grew deeper.

"The young gentleman is most excusable," said the old man in a carrying tone. "We are so accustomed to Aunt Sylvia's delectable dishes that I doubt if we fully appreciate them."

The crack in the door vanished, and Julia Frost, humbly waiting, found herself suddenly raised to unusual eminence.

"You hyar dat, Julia Frost?" inquired Aunt Sylvia, her lips pressed into the soft gray fur. "Dat's quality speaking in dere. Now, we'll go rest ourselves in de kitchen, and tell 'Vanus to polish up Jessie an' Mary Anne, not forgetting Ezry, an' see if dere won't be some compulments fo' him to-morrow day."

When the supper was over there was a grouping of the company around the fire. Mrs. Compton said good-night after a few moments, and went up-stairs to little Dick, telling Nancy she would see her again when bedtime came. Nancy and Marguerite sat in a big chair together. The three boys surrounded Jack on the old settle, while the Admiral and the General, in two



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easy leather-covered lounging-chairs, talked and talked until the clock struck nine, then the General turned to his boys, pressed close to Jack and drinking in his stories of life at college, wide-eyed and much of the time open-mouthed in their excitement.

"Attention!" called the General as Jack, catching his eye, ended a story abruptly. "Right about face!"

The three boys faced about and stood, rigid, arms at their sides.

"Shoulder arms!" commanded the General, and each boy shouldered an imaginary musket.

"March!" said the General, and the line, headed by Malcolm, started for the staircase.

"Password!" called the General, and without turning their heads, the small soldiers gave the password.

"Good-night and pleasant dreams to all," they chorused with a strong accent of the syllable which came with the left foot, and marched on, up the stairs, without another word or look, in response to the "good-nights" called to them by those left behind.

"They retired in good order," said the Admiral; "is that the way they always go?"

"It's the only way they will go," laughed the Gen-



eral. "Any sort of soldier play will carry them through things they don't like."

"When father is away, mother and I have an awful time," said Marguerite. "If mother says, 'It's bed-time, boys!' you ought to hear them groan."

"We used to go to bed about this time last autumn, Marguerite," said Nancy. "What time would you like to go to-night?"

"I'm ready to start this minute," said Marguerite frankly. "I don't know as I can swallow many more yawns; this fire makes me so warm and drowsy. And there are the stars to see after we get up-stairs."

So the two little girls said good-night, and five minutes later, wrapped closely together in a great blanket, they stood on Nancy's balcony, hunting for old friends in the sky. The snow had ceased, the clouds were broken, and here and there shone out a star, clear, pale gold against the drifting racks of white, and the blue black dome of the sky.

"See, there's the dear old Dipper," whispered Marguerite. "I never really thought about the stars till we looked at them together, Nancy. Won't we have a good time this week? And in the spring, you know, you are coming down to make me a visit; your grandfather and your brother Jack both say you shall; and



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I'll show you all the sights, and take you to a party or two, and—oh, all sorts of things. Won't that be lovely?"

"I'm sure it would," said Nancy, but Marguerite gave her a little pinch under the shawl.

"Not 'would,' Nancy; 'will' is the word for you to say," she corrected. "Say 'will,' Nancy dear."

"Marguerite," said Nancy, with pink cheeks, hidden by the sheltering darkness, "I hope it may be 'will,' but I'd have to get a good many new things to be ready for a visit to the city, and perhaps, when the time comes, grandfather may think it is too expensive."

Marguerite was dismayed, but with a little pang she knew that Nancy spoke the truth; the city was quite a different place from Beaumont Corners. And this was not a case where money might be offered; the Admiral's pride would instantly resent it. And Nancy's dear, shabby little gowns! "Oh," she thought, "mother will have to find a way!"

"At any rate I shall plan for it," she said, rubbing her cheek against Nancy's, "and I believe you will come, Nancy Beaumont. You may have a fortune left you before spring!"

Nancy's laugh rang out on the still air.

"There's nobody to leave it to me, Marguerite," she



said. "But I may think of a way to earn some money ; I have all sorts of ideas in my head."

"We'll talk them over," said Marguerite, "and perhaps I might help you plan. Father says I have a very practical head, Nancy."

"You'll have a cold in it if we stay out here any longer," said Nancy, affectionately, and she drew her friend into the room. There was more chat, back and forth between the two, and the spring of the "secret drawer" was tried, to make sure that it worked all right.

"For there's Christmas morning, and all the other days when we may wish to use it," said Marguerite. "Yes, it's all right, Nancy. Now I suppose we must go to bed ; but you remember what's to happen to you ? What I've been just longing for, ever since I knew you. Mother said I was to tap on her door, gently, and she'd know what it was for, and she'd come and tuck you up for the night, just the way she does me."

"Oh, that will be sweet," breathed Nancy, and it was sweet ; the soft, motherly arms around her, and the gentle good-night kiss, and the smoothing and tucking in of the coverlet, all of it was sweet, and Nancy loved it.

But when the General and the Admiral had come



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up-stairs, and Jack had gone past her door to his room, softly whistling, and all the house was still and dark, Nancy sat up in bed, and listened. There was a little stir outside her door which was not closed ; ears less sharp than Nancy's would scarcely have heard it. She gave a small, half-smothered cough, and at the sound there stood in the doorway a tall figure.

"Aunt Sylvia," called Nancy, softly, through the dark, her face turned to the door. "Aunt Sylvia, please come here."

"Is you wanting anyt'ing, honey ?" The voice that Nancy loved had a strained sound as if Aunt Sylvia's throat were stiff, and the figure was only just over the threshold.

"Yes, I am wanting something," said Nancy ; "I am wanting you to tell me good-night and see if I'm tucked in all right, and sit down by the bed, and just hum me one verse of 'Blow li'l' breezes,' before I go to sleep ; that's what I'm wanting."

The figure moved across the room, and the old black hands patted the pillows and straightened out the coverings so lately smoothed, but strangely creased and tumbled.

"I s'posed my honey was all 'tended to by de quality," said Aunt Sylvia. "I reckoned ——"



Nancy caught one of the hands and laid her cheek against it.

“Don’t you ever s’pose or reckon again, Aunt Sylvia,” she said gently. “But if you’re tired, you needn’t sing to me.”

“Tired!” echoed Aunt Sylvia, as she seated herself, and began to rock to and fro. “I was tired ’bout ten minutes ago; tired an’ old an’ useless-feeling, honey; but now I’s as rested as eber I was in my life. You jess shut yo’ little eyes, an’ let Aunt Sylvy blow you right off to Dreamland on dose li’l’ breezes.”



## CHAPTER IV

### CHRISTMAS IN THE AIR

"MARGUERITE," said Nancy the next morning, as the little girls walked down the stairs with their arms entwined, "there is so much to be done to-day that I don't know where to begin! The day before Christmas has always been the most exciting time of the whole year to me, because Aunt Sylvia has always planned some sort of 's'prise fun' for me Christmas Eve; but I've never had any company before; and Jack has never been at home until just the last minute."

She drew a long breath of delight and gave Marguerite's arm a little squeeze.

"I've seen Jack already this morning," she added. "He whistled at my door about half an hour ago, and told me he was taking Malcolm and Ted off for a turn on their snow-shoes before breakfast."

"They insisted on bringing those great things up here," said Marguerite, "and now I suppose they'll be too proud for words, to think they've had a chance to use them right away. Malcolm belongs to a snow-



shoe club ; he's the youngest boy in it—not twelve yet, his birthday comes in March ; Ted's two years younger, but he has to do everything Malcolm does, no matter what it is. Why, he almost cried to think mother wouldn't let him put on glasses when Malcolm had to ! and he's as far-sighted as any one could possibly be, the oculist said, and he hasn't one bit of astigmatism, or anything like that."

"Hasn't he?" said Nancy, as they stood before the fire waiting for the others to come to breakfast. Then she dimpled and laughed. "I don't know what asti—I don't know what that word means," she confessed.

"I'm the poorest person in the world to explain things," said Marguerite, "particularly when I'm not quite sure about them, Nancy. It means—why, it means that you don't see what you ought to, the way you ought to, and you don't see alike."

"Oh," said Nancy, demurely, "perhaps I have it, Marguerite."

She put her fingers over first one eye and then the other, gazing fixedly at Marguerite with the open eye each time.

"I haven't it," she announced solemnly. "I see what I ought to, the way I ought to, and I see it alike."



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They were laughing over their small joke when down the stairs came Mrs. Compton and little Dick, followed by the Admiral and his old friend, and at the same moment the door burst open and in trooped Jack and his three admirers.

"I couldn't go everywhere they did," cried Roger before any one else could speak, "but I went most of the way, and then I stood on a big stone that was sticking up out of the snow, and was a general cheering on my men, and shouted all sorts of orders to them. But, mother, I must have snow-shoes next winter—can't I, father? You know, really, father, when you're nine you're too old for rubber-boots."

"Do you see what Jack is doing?" asked the General in a stern voice, but with a quick glance of amusement at the Admiral, who was looking at the boy with a tolerant smile. "Where are your manners?"

Jack was bowing over Mrs. Compton's hand with the ease and grace of a courtier. In the twinkling of an eye a line of three formed before Nancy and Malcolm's best dancing-school bow was executed for her benefit, and imitated by Ted and Roger. As the line faced toward the Admiral, little Dick stepped from his mother's sheltering arm and advanced with outstretched hand.



"I slept all night, thank you," he said, and solemnly inclined his curly head as Nancy shook his hand.

"Oh, Dick, won't you play little boy, to please me, while you're here?" pleaded Nancy. "Malcolm and Ted and Roger are big boys—but I've never had a little brother, and I had such hopes you'd play you were mine, just for a week. Won't you?"

Dick looked at his mother, his father, and his brothers, who were formed in a half-circle before Jack. He looked again at Nancy, and a little smile curved his mouth; he remembered Julia Frost, and Aunt Sylvia's strong, soft arms, and her cookies of which Marguerite had told.

"I will," he said gravely. "Mother said I could be your holiday knight," he added with the clear speech which had been his from the time he began to talk.

"Then you must wear a silver star," said Nancy, "to show you are my knight. I'll get it for you as soon as breakfast is over."

"I shouldn't mind having a star," said Malcolm, looking across the table at Nancy when they were seated. "I like decorations."

"So do I," said Ted; "and so do I," chimed in Roger.

Little Dick looked up at his mother, but she shook her head to reassure him.



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"Young ladies need only one knight at a time," she said, "and Nancy has chosen Dick. He has the star in token of his rank; but if Malcolm or Ted or Roger should do anything, while we are here, to deserve decoration, I've no doubt Nancy would honor you with one."

The boys turned hopefully toward Nancy.

"Of course," she said, entering into the spirit of the plan at once. "I have some beautiful red stars that would be just right for honors, Mrs. Compton. Wouldn't you like those, Malcolm and Ted and Roger?"

"They'd be pretty good, I think," said Malcolm, gazing at her through his glasses.

"Pretty good," echoed Ted, and Roger nodded his approval.

"To be earned, remember," said Mrs. Compton, "by courtesy and thoughtfulness and generosity and courage."

At that the three boys looked a little disheartened, but the entrance of Aunt Sylvia with a plate of steaming flap-jacks drove away all thoughts of decorations, honorary and difficult to secure, for the time.

"I shall need the help of—let me see—just about three boys, to carry out some plans for Christmas,"



said Jack. "I have to go into Potterville this morning. Any offers of assistance?"

"Would we do?" chorused Malcolm, Ted and Roger.

Jack surveyed them critically, and then smiled at Mrs. Compton.

"Strange to say, they seem just the sizes and ages I require," he said. "May I borrow them, Mrs. Compton?"

"Indeed you may," said their mother cordially. "Aunt Sylvia has asked me to help her with some of her preparations."

Nancy slipped her hand over little Dick's, under cover of the table-cloth.

"And Marguerite and I want Dick very much," she said. "May we have him for the morning, Mrs. Compton?"

"I don't see but the way is clear for us, General," said the Admiral, rubbing his hands in anticipation. "What do you say to a game of chess?"

"The time seems ripe," said the General, "and nothing would please me better than a chance to beat you."

"As to that, we'll see," said the Admiral. "Nancy, do you happen to remember where the board was placed after our—after the last game?"



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"It is on the little round table in the library now, grandfather," said Nancy. "I found it yesterday when we were putting the room in order. You had set it away carefully."

"As I always do," said the Admiral with his most satisfied manner.

"Grandfather tried to teach me how to play chess after you went home in the fall," said Nancy to Marguerite when breakfast was over, and they stood looking out at the beautiful white world arched by a sky of clear, deep blue. "And he grew very much discouraged with me, and he put the chess-board away, we didn't know where. But this morning Aunt Sylvia found it when she and Betty were cleaning, on a high shelf that no one but grandfather could reach without a chair; he has long arms, and he's so tall; and my grandmother was an inch taller—just think of that, Marguerite."

"You're tall enough for your age," said Marguerite, unimpressed by the appalling height of an old lady she had never seen. "I don't wish to be so very tall myself; I'd prefer to be exactly mother's height; I consider her just tall enough. I think I shall stop when I get to be on a level with her."

"How can you?" asked Nancy, wide-eyed.



"Why, there must be ways," said Marguerite decidedly. "I could fit myself into something every night, I think. Of course it's at night when we're stretched out, that we grow, I suppose. I shall manage it. But it is sad when you'd like to be taller than you are, and can't stretch enough. I know a boy at home—his father is the president of one of our banks—and it has always been his one ambition and desire to be a fireman; but he comes of a short family, and though he tries every way he hears of, he's four inches under the required height, now, and he's almost seventeen."

"And does he feel disappointed already?" asked Nancy. "He might grow."

"He's nearly broken-hearted, and he's given up the idea," said Marguerite. "He told me so at dancing-school last week, very solemnly. He said, 'Marguerite, a fellow of my age won't grow four inches in the next two years, and father's set on my going to college, at that time; as long as I can't have my chosen career,' he said, 'I shall try to please my parents.' I thought it was noble of him. I was quite thrilled, Nancy."

"But—but doesn't he care anything about books or study?" asked Nancy, on whom the Beaumont traditions had taken strong hold. "Of course firemen are



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splendid and brave—but it's a very dangerous life, isn't it, Marguerite?"

"Certainly, but this boy loves danger," said Marguerite. "He was very much interested about your secret passage, Nancy, and he said probably there were other doors and windings that had been closed for years. He said what a chance it would be to spend nights exploring such a place."

Nancy shook her head. She did not specially fancy this adventurous friend of Marguerite.

"It would be very unpleasant, I think," she said, "and damp and dirty, Marguerite."

"So it would," said Marguerite whirling her gayly around. "I don't care much for that idea, myself. Oh, Nancy, what shall we do first?"

"I thought we'd take little Dick out to see Jessie and the others," said Nancy, "and then, when we are safe out in the barn where no one can hear us—for Jack will take Sylvanus with him—we'll plan about to-morrow. Jack told me I wasn't to make a single plan for anything between supper to-night and breakfast to-morrow morning—but we always have early breakfast Christmas, on account of seeing what's in our stockings, so it won't be so very long to wait."

"Do you hang up your stockings?" asked an eager



little voice at her elbow, and there stood Dick, the silvery star on his Russian blouse where Nancy had pinned it, his eyes big with wonder. "Do you believe in Santa Claus?"

Just at that moment Aunt Sylvia came into the room bearing to the old buffet a tray heaped with the breakfast silver.

"She was brought up by her mammy to b'lieve in Santy Claus," announced Aunt Sylvia before Nancy had time to answer. "But she's getting mos' too big now for de ol' man to come driving his reindeers way out hyah jess for her. I mostly 'tends to his business out hyah, de las' few years. But when a little honey boy like you is vis'ting, dere's no telling what he'll do."

Little Dick left Nancy's side and walked over to Aunt Sylvia.

"The boys—Malcolm and Ted and Roger—don't really believe in Santa Claus any longer," he said looking up at her. "But I like to believe in him, Aunt Sylvia; sometimes it seems as if he couldn't be just somebody dressed up, the way I heard them say; such queer things happen at Christmas time, seems as if there must be a real Santa Claus somewhere!"

Aunt Sylvia pulled down her spectacles, and gazed through them at the little boy.



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"Dat's a fac'," she said; "mighty queer things happens; you jess wait till to-night and see! Now if you's gwine out in de barn wid yo' comp'ny, Miss Nancy, I'll have dat Betty set dese rooms to rights. Put on all de warm wraps out 'n de hall chist, honey, and you'll find Julia Frost waiting for you, to show de little boy her kittens. She's collected dose two kittens from where dey was, and she's spatting fust one, den de other, to keep 'em inside de barn. I saw her ten minutes ago, and she cert'nly appeared impatient fo' vis'tors."

"Did Julia Frost know we were going to the barn?" asked Dick as he was enveloped in a big shawl from the old chest.

"I think perhaps—probably—Aunt Sylvia put her out in the barn," said Nancy, as she drew an old fur-lined cape over Marguerite's shoulders and tied it on with a cord. "But Julia really understands a great deal."

"The first time I saw her, Dick, she was hiding in this very chest," said Marguerite, as Nancy shut down the lid, and they started for the barn, "and Nancy only found her because she mewed so loud."

"How loud?" inquired little Dick who always wished to have things made clear, as they ran along the





OUT IN THE BARN







hard path to the barn, the snow crunching under their feet.

"As loud as—listen, Dick!" said Nancy, as they reached the barn door. It was open a crack, and from that crack, at which was placed a small gray nose, came such a "miaow" as Dick had never heard before—"as loud as that," said Nancy as she slid the door open, and Julia Frost with her two kittens, Spick and Span, came into full view.

Dick was formally introduced to Jessie and Mary Anne, as well as to Ezra whom he had not really met, the night before. He was shown the hens, in their houses near by.

"And the pigs, Nancy, I think he'd like to see the pigs," said Marguerite; "there were four; I remember how cunning they were that first time I saw them."

"There are only——" began Nancy, with pink cheeks, but at that moment there came the sound of a loud, choking sneeze from the hay-loft, followed by another and another.

Marguerite clapped her hands, and though Nancy tried to look dignified, she laughed in spite of herself.

"This is exactly like my last visit," whispered Marguerite, as in response to Nancy's call, Sylvanus came down the stairs.



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But Nancy was not to be coaxed by Sylvanus into an exhibition of Jessie's accomplishments that morning.

"My brother wishes you to put Ezra into the sleigh at once, Sylvanus," said Nancy with an air of decision. Then she relented a little as she saw his crestfallen face. "We'll have a Christmas Day exhibition, Sylvanus," she added, "and I'm sure the beautiful polish on all their coats will be just as bright to-morrow as it is to-day."

The three children watched and waited until the old sleigh, drawn by Ezra, had bumped over the sill; then Nancy slid the door across.

"Now, we'll go up to the hay-loft where it's warm," she said, "and I will tell you my Christmas plans."

"Am I in them?" asked little Dick, as he stumped up the narrow uneven stairs after Nancy, closely followed by Marguerite, whose hand he had disdained when she offered to help him.

"Are you in them?" echoed Nancy as they arrived at the hay-loft and she waved her guests to warm and fragrant seats. "Why, you are one of the most important parts of them."

"I s'posed I was, on account of my star," said Dick as he settled comfortably into the hay. "I should like to hear about them, please, right away."



“So should I,” said Marguerite; “please begin to tell, Nancy.”

Then Nancy began, to an audience of five, for Julia Frost, after one long, indignant “miaow” at being left behind, escorted her kittens up the flight of stairs, and took a position from which she and her family commanded a fine view of the company, and could hear every word that was said.



## CHAPTER V

### A REAL SANTA CLAUS

ALL day long there was an air of excitement and mystery about the old house at Beaumont Corners. The parlor was shut off from the hall, its door tightly closed and a placard bearing the words "No Admittance" was put against it.

"That's just for us," Nancy confided to Marguerite when they discovered the placard, on their return from the barn. "I mean for us children. I'm sure your mother is in there now, with Aunt Sylvia, and I think grandfather is there, too, and your father."

"They're not in the library," announced Marguerite, "for I've just looked; but the chess-board is out; perhaps they're being consulted. Here they come. Let's be warming our hands, with our backs to the door, as if we didn't notice the placard or anything unusual."

They carried out this suggestion at once, but little Dick saw no reason for turning his back on anything of interest; he stood, his sturdy legs well apart (after the style of an attitude he had often admired when his



oldest brother took it), staring straight at the parlor door. But never did two elderly gentlemen, one of whom was quite stout, squeeze out of so small a space before.

"All I could see was just a little piece of one chair," announced Dick in a tone of regret. "Is there a secret in there, father?"

"Salute your superior officer," said the General gravely.

The little legs came together, the little arms hung stiffly at his sides, and then one of Dick's small hands touched his forehead as if he had worn a cap, and describing an angle, descended again to his side.

"Your post is changed to the library or the up-stairs rooms until dinner time," said the General, "and no questions are allowed."

Then the General marched into the library, followed by the Admiral, who was chuckling audibly.

"To think of that scrap of a boy taking military orders," said the Admiral. "Does he like it?"

"Like it!" said the General. "Didn't you see his face? He's as proud as Punch when I treat him as I do the others. Every one of my boys wants to go into the army. Malcolm's eyes will bar him out from active warfare, but he's settled it that he'll be the chaplain of some regiment. He's talked it over with our



## 50 *The Admiral's Little Housekeeper*

minister and his Sunday-school teacher, and they haven't discouraged him much."

"You have a fine set of boys," said the Admiral wistfully. "I wish—— You would have been a better man to bring up Jack than I have proved myself."

"Nothing of the sort," said the General, laying his hand on his old friend's shoulder for a moment. "He's a fine young fellow, and you'll be prouder of him with every year he lives."

"I'm proud enough of him now," said the Admiral, "but—I haven't been fair to Nancy. The boy has had so much, there's little left for her. And my investments—I never had any head for business—have not prospered."

"The boy's your best investment," persisted the General; "dear little Nancy would be the first to say so. As for her, why, there are friends who stand ready—I should say——" the General faltered under the keen eyes turned on him.

"She wants for nothing," said the Admiral fiercely. "Can you see that she lacks anything needful? I was only speaking of the years to come."

"Why, of course she has a beautiful home and the best care," said the General lamely, adding to himself,



"I shall have to tell Mary I made a botch of it, at the very beginning."

"Then let us say no more on the subject," and the Admiral sat stiffly down in his chair at the chess table, motioning his guest to the other. "You are loading us with favors, as it is. I think it was your play when we were called to the parlor, was it not?"

"It was," said the General, meekly, "and a pretty corner you've driven me into!"

"That was my design," and the Admiral, his temper calmed, leaned back in his chair and surveyed the board with triumph.

Dinner was a somewhat hurried and informal meal that day, and scarcely a sentence was begun and ended properly, for every one, save little Dick who ate his dinner in wide-eyed silence, had something to conceal, and was in constant danger of betraying it.

"I thought we had pretty fair shops at home," said Malcolm, "but there's one in Potterville, mother, that goes ahead of any city shop that I ever saw. Why, you can get ——"

Here Jack gave a sepulchral, warning cough, and Malcolm stopped short.

"It's the best I ever saw," he ended.

"It's a first-rate shop," said Ted with conviction.



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"Fine," said Roger.

"Are you going into town again this afternoon, Jack?" asked Mrs. Compton. "Because if you are you may get me—oh ——" and Mrs. Compton paused as a low groan came from the door where Aunt Sylvia was handing over a precious dish to Betty. "I'd better wait a little," she finished with a smile.

"I thought perhaps I'd send Sylvanus in this afternoon," said Jack, "for after I've started the boys coasting, I want to help about, er—I want to help ——"

"You and I seem to be the only ones without any secret, father," said Marguerite across the table; but the General scoffed at her.

"I don't know anything about you," he said, "but I want you to understand, young lady, that a great many secrets have been confided to me, both about—ouch!" cried the General, turning reproachfully to his wife. "You needn't have done that, Mary. I knew when to stop."

"Oh, well, I have been confided in, too," said Marguerite, airily. "I only said that for fear you might be feeling left out."

"Indeed, miss!" said the General, severely, and when Marguerite nodded at him across the table, every one laughed.



There was one part of the program for the day which little Dick did not understand or relish. He was requested to go to bed at five o'clock in the afternoon, instead of sitting up until six, which was his usual bedtime. The explanations offered him failed to be quite convincing.

"I wouldn't be too tired to do the things tomorrow if I sat up till six," he said to Nancy who was endeavoring to coax him, as he stood, with a mutinous little frown on his forehead, at his mother's side; and when Aunt Sylvia offered her explanation he was still doubtful though somewhat more resigned.

"Santy Claus will be coming 'long in de middle ob de night if he come at all, little honey boy," said Aunt Sylvia, "and if you don' go to bed till late as six o'clock, you'd be sound, sound asleep when he'd come, 'tinkly-tinkly, jingle, jangle,' along de road, and up on de roof and down de chimbley. And if you is sound asleep, don' you know nobody's gwine wake you up? But if you totes off to bed at five o'clock, you'll be over yo' first dreams, and sleeping jess light an' easy, and 'twouldn't s'prise Aunt Sylvy if you saw Santy Claus right in dis yer house."

"We-e-l," said little Dick. It had been an exciting



## 54 *The Admiral's Little Housekeeper*

day; there was no use in missing any possible chance. "Then p'r'aps I'd better go."

He went to sleep in his bed, but it was no surprise to him to find himself in quite another place when he awoke. The same thing had happened to Dick a number of times; there was no special reason for expecting to wake in the place where you went to sleep. He rubbed his eyes and looked about him. He was in one corner of the long sofa in the hall, covered with a great warm shawl, and with a soft pillow under his head, which was turned, so that on fairly opening his eyes he saw Nancy, standing by the door that led into the library, her fingers on her lips, as if she said "Hush!" As she caught Dick's eye, she pointed toward the fireplace, and slipped into the library, out of sight.

Little Dick looked over his shoulder; as he did so he heard a faint jingling of bells that seemed to come from overhead. And there, his broad back turned to Dick, his hands stuffing something in Dick's stocking—which was really an unusual size for a little boy!—stood Santa Claus. There was no mistaking his red, fur-trimmed coat and cap, or his white hair and bushy beard.

Dick coughed in a very gentle and cautious manner, and at the sound Santa Claus wheeled about. There



was his ruddy face, and there were his twinkling eyes.

“Ah, ha! young man!” he said in a deep voice. “So you’ve caught me.”

“Yes, sir,” said Dick politely, “but I didn’t see what you were putting in my stocking.”

“Your stocking!” said Santa Claus. “Well, I must say! Let me see your feet.”

“It’s one of Marguerite’s,” said little Dick; “but my name is on it. Didn’t you see that?”

“I’ll admit that I did,” said Santa Claus. “Christmas is such a time for borrowing stockings that nothing surprises me. Perhaps you can tell me what young gentleman now visiting here wears a silver star in token that he is the chosen knight of Miss Nancy Beaumont.”

Little Dick unwrapped the shawl and stood on the floor. Queerly enough the silver star was pinned to his flannel nightgown, in the very best place to show.

“See,” said little Dick, pointing proudly to his decoration.

“Ah,” said Santa Claus. “Then will you kindly put on these moccasins and this fur coat I happened to have in my pack, and show me the way to Miss Nancy’s door, and then to Miss Marguerite Compton’s?”



## 56 *The Admiral's Little Housekeeper*

Dick was almost strangled with pride, as Santa Claus helped him into his coat. He put up his hand and pulled down the ear of his Christmas guest.

"S-sh!" he whispered. "She's—in—the—library."

Santa Claus puffed out his cheeks and made his eyes bulge.

"S-sh, indeed," he said between his teeth. "Lead, and I'll follow."

On tiptoe Dick led the way, Santa following, stepping very lightly for a person of his build, with a pack on his shoulders.

"Aren't the others to have anything from your pack?" whispered Dick when the square bundles had been left at Nancy's door and Marguerite's, and one still larger at his mother's.

"I put theirs inside the parlor door before you woke," said Santa Claus.

"Didn't you see 'No Admittance' on the door?" asked Dick as they tiptoed down-stairs.

"Oh, that wasn't meant for me," said Santa Claus. "I go wherever I like. Now you take off the coat and slippers, hop up on that sofa again, and I'll tuck you in. Then you shut your eyes—tight—and don't open them again till you hear my bells jingle."

It might have been five minutes—it might have been



ten—before little Dick, his head on the pillow, his eyes tightly screwed together, heard the faint jingle of the bells from above; then there was a sound as if something bumped down to the snow from the roof, and then more jingling, growing fainter and fainter till it died away. He sat up, and opened his eyes wide. The candles were spluttering in their sockets, the big hall was growing dark. The old clock struck twelve, slowly and solemnly.

With the last stroke there appeared in the library doorway the tall figure of Aunt Sylvia, with Nancy at her side.

“What did I tell you, little honey boy?” said Aunt Sylvia, as she gathered Dick up into her long arms. “Isn’t you glad now you went to bed at five o’clock?”

“Yes, I am,” said Dick. He looked down at the sofa. “Where did the coat and moccasins go?” he asked sleepily.

“You wait till to-morrow day,” said Aunt Sylvia. “Santy Claus is no Injun giver.”

“Sleep well, holiday knight,” said Nancy as little Dick was borne up-stairs. “It’s all safe now,” she added softly, and out from the darkness of the library came the Admiral, with the General, Marguerite and Malcolm, Ted and Roger.



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"Mother got up-stairs like a mouse while his eyes were shut," said Malcolm.

"Stillest thing I ever saw," said Ted.

"Couldn't hear a step," said Roger.

Then from the door at the back of the hall in stepped Santa Claus, much shrunken in figure and without his white hair and beard, while behind him came Betty, with a tall pitcher of steaming lemonade.

"That was good practice for to-morrow night," said Jack, stamping his feet.

"You were fine," said Malcolm.

"The best I ever saw," said Ted.

"Best I ever saw, too," said Roger.

Up-stairs little Dick was saying to his mother, "I've seen him, mother, and he talked to me, and—I mustn't tell you any more, but you'll know to-morrow, he was a real Santa Claus!"



## CHAPTER VI

### CAROLS AND CATS

It seemed to Nancy as if her cheek had scarcely touched her pillow when she opened her eyes again to find the first pale light of the Christmas morning stealing into her room. She sprang out of bed, and running to her bureau she took out from one of the drawers a soft package wrapped in white tissue-paper and tied with a red ribbon. Attached to the ribbon was a small card on which was painted a sprig of holly and underneath it: "Merry Christmas to Marguerite, with Nancy's love."

She lifted the tapestry and laid the package carefully in the secret drawer, and touched the spring; the drawer shot forward, and Nancy crept back to bed, hugging herself delightedly.

"The little click will wake her up, I think," said Nancy, "and then she'll see the drawer is open, and she'll run to it. I hope she'll like that little bag; Aunt Sylvia thought it was pretty, and so did Mrs. Potter; she told me she'd seen 'hundreds of bags, but never



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one like that,' and she looked very flattering, I thought. There, I hear Marguerite! She's opening her door."

"May I come in?" asked Marguerite, and Nancy called a blithe welcome to her, and a "Merry Christmas."

"That makes twice you've said it, before I had a chance," Marguerite complained laughingly, as she snuggled into bed and gave Nancy her Christmas kiss. "I was afraid to call it for fear you weren't awake. I suppose the click of the drawer waked me, but I didn't hear it; I just opened my eyes and saw the drawer out, and I didn't know but you might have done it last night, after I went to sleep. Oh, Nancy, I've brought my package in here to unwrap, because there's one in the drawer for you, now, and I want to see your face when you look at it. And then there are our packages from Santa Claus to open, too. I thought we'd better do those together, so I brought mine."

Nancy ran to the tapestry again, lifted it, moved the sliding panel and took out from the drawer a small flat package.

"Now we never could decide which of us should open her package first," said Marguerite, "so let us open them precisely together, Nancy. You count, 'one, two, three,' and then we'll untie the bows; then



‘four, five, six,’ and we’ll slip off the papers. Now ——”

“One, two, three,” said Nancy, and the ribbon bows were untied; “four, five, six,” and the soft wrappings were flung off on the coverlet, and there were two “O-o-h’s” from the little girls sitting up in bed with pink cheeks and sparkling eyes.

“‘For your party slippers,’” read Marguerite. “Oh, Nancy!”

“‘For your bureau and your neck,’” read Nancy. “Oh, Marguerite!”

“Did you do that wonderful embroidery?” asked Marguerite in a voice of awe. “Those darling little pink daisies on that beautiful linen? And that little vine running down the middle to make a pocket for each slipper. How could you, Nancy?”

“Why, that’s the only kind of work that seems like play to me,” said Nancy. “I love to do it; and the Christmas daisies are like you, I think. But my present, Marguerite, is too beautiful! It would have made me just perfectly happy to have your photograph in this dear little frame; but a necklace, too! Oh, Marguerite!”

“The necklace is made of little tourmalines with the silver links between, you see,” said Marguerite.



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"Mother helped me choose that, and she said your grandfather would be willing for you to wear it, because it's so simple. When you're grown up father says you'll have some wonderful old Beaumont jewelry to wear; he's seen it. But, Nancy, when you speak of that picture frame—please take special notice of that spray of forget-me-nots. I did those—every stitch of them!"

"Why, Marguerite Compton," cried Nancy, "I thought you'd told me you couldn't embroider. I supposed this little frame was bought just the way it is now. I shall think more of it than ever. And your photograph is sweet."

"I never have embroidered before," said Marguerite, "and I don't know as I ever shall again, Nancy. I spoiled four frames before I got one that mother thought would do at all. And this one looks better a good way off than it does close to, Nancy. Malcolm says that spray of forget-me-nots is not a bit like the real flowers; but of course I told him art is quite different from nature." Marguerite gazed thoughtfully at her slipper-case. "I don't know as he'd better see these daisies," she added.

After a few minutes they opened the packages which Santa Claus had left at their doors the night before.



Marguerite's was a pink box, and on it lay a card with "Best Christmas wishes to Miss Marguerite from Jack Beaumont" on it. Nancy's was a blue box with "Christmas love to the dearest little sister in the world, from Jack," on the card.

Inside the boxes were layers of candy, many kinds and colors, with a goodly number of the chocolates so much enjoyed by both the little girls.

"I feel so proud to have a box just like yours, and yet entirely different, from your grown-up brother," said Marguerite, as she tasted a candied nut. "Ever since he sent that telephone message about Jessie, saying we could not buy her after all, I have admired him very much. Before that I felt he was not quite worthy of you, Nancy."

"Worthy of me!" exclaimed Nancy. "Why, Marguerite! All I think about is being worthy of Jack, and of grandfather. It's so responsible to try to be a Beaumont, when you really are exactly like the Frost side of your family, who were not quite so fearless and brave."

"Pooh!" said Marguerite airily. "Mother says there are a good many kinds of bravery, and I notice it myself, more and more, the older I grow. Don't you breathe it, if I tell you something—I suppose my



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father was probably the bravest man in the whole army; Malcolm says he thinks so, and he's a great reader of history—he says few heroes compare favorably with father, in his opinion—well, my dear child, that man is as afraid to go to the dentist as—as Roger! Isn't that a revelation?"

Nancy had no time to give her opinion on that point, for at the moment there came from the hall the sound of steps and of talking, subdued but still audible. Then there was a soft "Now!" and then four voices, Jack's and those of Malcolm, Ted and Roger.

"Sing, oh, sing, this blessed morn," came the words of the old carol, and through the house doors opened and the listeners stood till the last verse was finished. Then there was the sound of clapping hands, and "Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!" from door to door.

"Let us hurry and get dressed, Marguerite," said Nancy, "so we shan't miss any of the holiday—not a single scrap. Do the boys always sing as well as that?"

"They do not," said Marguerite with emphasis as she gathered up her presents to carry back to her room. "But they know a few tunes from Sunday-school, and



on those few tunes, father says, they could challenge the world, he thinks, to outsing them."

One thing followed another so quickly all that Christmas Day that Marguerite, who kept a diary, was obliged to run up to her room half a dozen times to make what she called a "jotting."

"They are just to remind me, Nancy, you know," she explained; "so in after years when I read these diaries of mine, it will bring back the time, as if it were yesterday. I do a good many of them in a short-hand I've invented. See—last Hallowe'en I went to a party, and I have it all down here. Here is 'fro-gym-hats' in one place; that means—well, I can't think just now what it means, but it will all return to my memory later; you know it always does to old ladies. I've put down for to-day all about the breakfast pie, with the trinkets we each had from father, and about Dick's having the trumpet and playing page all day—no, I mean herald; and how I tried to take photographs of the dinner table with us all at it.

"And I've mentioned the pig, because he was one of the family on my first visit, and he was so delicious for dinner, and looked so attractive. Then of course I've told about the exhibition in the barn, and how wonderful Jessie was, and about the medal you gave



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Sylvanus. I've finished up to this very minute—four o'clock P. M. is my last date, and I've used up the pages way over to December twenty-eighth."

"You must like to write better than I do, Marguerite," said Nancy. "Do you feel sleepy? Wouldn't it be dreadful if we had to keep putting our hands up to our mouths to-night, when I'm sure the party will be the most exciting of all."

Just then the General came out into the hall where the two little girls were sitting close together on the old sofa.

"See here," said the General, "I shall have to put you two under military discipline. I order a fatigue drill at once."

Nancy sat up, smiling, but uncertain what to do. Marguerite, however, rose, drawing Nancy's hand through her arm, and standing in a very loose-jointed attitude.

"For the family that means a nap, or at any rate lying down in a wrapper," she said. "Come along, Nancy dear."

The Admiral was asleep in the library, the three admirers of Jack were out somewhere in the snow with him; Mrs. Compton was up-stairs with little Dick, and the General had followed Nancy and Marguerite to his



“suite.” Aunt Sylvia was asleep in the kitchen, and Betty was painfully reading the “Potterville Clarion.” All these things Julia Frost discovered on her soft-footed tour of inspection. She pushed open the door into the hall, and bade her two kittens follow her.

“Now,” said Julia Frost, in language understood by her immediate family, “we can have the fire to ourselves for a while. Watch me curl up on the rug for a Christmas nap, and then imitate me as nearly as possible. There’s been so much going on to-day, and I’ve had to keep so carefully out from underfoot, and see that you two did the same, that I’ve hardly drawn a long breath—and I’m all worn out. We must be ready for evening, when very likely we shall be wanted to help entertain the guests. Now don’t let me hear another word from either of you till I give you leave to speak.”

The kittens obeyed so well that they were fast asleep in five minutes. It was a few minutes later that Julia Frost, who was lying well away from them, silently uncurled herself, and after a glance at her children, stepped noiselessly to the parlor door. Lying stretched out on the floor she applied her nose to the crack under the door with most satisfactory results.

“I thought as much,” she remarked to herself as she



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resumed an upright position and returned with cautious footsteps to the exact spot on the rug which she had left a moment before. "It smells like the woods in that room, and I can see green. I am looking forward to a very pleasant evening."



## CHAPTER VII

### THE ADMIRAL'S GUESTS

WHEN Nancy woke after her nap it was to the sound of a rocking-chair, creaking gently to and fro.

"Is it time for me to get dressed, Aunt Sylvia?" asked Nancy, smiling at her old nurse. "And have you come to help me into my dress? Oh, Aunt Sylvia, don't you almost wish I had a new one for the company? But my beautiful new necklace will be enough to change my old dress, won't it?"

"Is you casted yo' eye at what's in Aunt Sylvy's lap?" asked the old woman. "Is you 'customed to seeing Aunt Sylvy holding de end ob a sheet off fr'm her lap, and sitting close to de window-seat whar dere's more sheet spread out loose, an' humped up high? I reckon my lamb isn't half waked up, or else she'd have a teeny mite ob cur'osity."

"Oh, Aunt Sylvia, what is it?" cried Nancy, jumping from the bed and running to her old mammy. "Why—why—where did it come from—that lovely dress?"

"It come from Mis' Gen'l Compton," said Aunt



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Sylvia, rising and holding before Nancy's enchanted eye a lovely little frock of softest blue with a shimmer of silvery white beneath it. "Miss Marguerite has one de precise image ob dis, only 'cepting it has pink where dis is blue, and kind o' fawn color where dis is silvery, and daisies where dis has forget-me-nots."

Aunt Sylvia held the dress at arm's length and moved it so that the shimmer of the silver gleamed through the fluffy blue.

"And who you s'pose gives you dis present 'longside o' Mis' Gen'l Compton?" she asked.

"The General?" breathed Nancy, one finger on the fluff of blue, where a bunch of forget-me-nots caught it into a filmy rosette.

"Not de Gen'l," said Aunt Sylvia proudly. "Isn't dere any one else would nachelly give you de best she could find? 'Tis yo' ole Aunt Sylvy; an' she earned it! Half o' de prices o' dis beautiful dress Aunt Sylvy earned, an' sent de money in a letter to Miss Marguerite, dat 'Vanus printed all out himself, and posted and got de answer from. It had one o' dose big long stamps on it to make it go quick, and it had a square one to make it go safe, and 'Vanus he kep' de slip o' paper Bartley Pearson was 'bleeged to give him, in de heel o' his best boots till he got de receipts an' de letter



from Miss Marguerite. An' her mother wrote me, besides; dat was why I felt 'quainted with Mis' Gen'l Compton befo' ever I saw her. Don' look at me dat way, my lamb," begged Aunt Sylvia as she laid the beautiful little frock on the bed and held out her arms to Nancy.

Nancy's hand was at her throat, where it was so apt to go, when there was no one to criticize, and something moved her greatly. But when she saw Aunt Sylvia's pleading face she went to the old arms and let herself be drawn down to sit on the crackling apron that covered the best black dress.

"An' de Admiral he was willing," said Aunt Sylvia, "so you no need to worry 'bout dat. He s'poses I save de money out o' my wages dat he pays me," and she chuckled gleefully. "Dat's what he s'poses. He ain' ask me, so I didn' hab de 'cessity of telling him. An' don' you ask me now, my lamb, fo' 'tis a kind o' mixed-up, long story. We'll leave dat till when de company is gone."

"I wish I could earn some money," said Nancy, while Aunt Sylvia was tying her curls with a ribbon which matched the new dress exactly. "We need a good many things, Aunt Sylvia, that money would get us,"



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"We'll have some o' dose t'ings," said Aunt Sylvia firmly. "Now, hol' yo' breath, my lamb, while I put dis over yo' haid. Dere! now, I'll sit down an' you back up to me an' I'll fasten de hooks. I's sewed 'em all over to make suah dey's strong; dose city dress-makers, dey has style, but dey hasn't de carefulness o' home sewers, no ma'am! My! how Bartley Pearson did reason an' arguefy wid 'Vanus, telling him 'twould be better to send a slip o' paper dat he called a 'order,' 'stead o' de real money. So he could see jess how much 'twas, o' course.

"But—Vanus—he—hel'—firm," said Aunt Sylvia, pressing a hook into its proper eye with each word. "He ain' my chile for nuffin'; an' his father had consid'able will-powers, too. Now, honey, you is a picture, suah! I'll go hook up Miss Marguerite next, an' you run in an' show yo'self to Mis' Gen'l Compton."

"You come with me," said Nancy, holding fast to Aunt Sylvia's hand. "It won't take a minute longer, and Marguerite will have that minute more to sleep."

"All I say, my lamb," whispered Aunt Sylvia when Marguerite was arrayed, and the two little girls were starting down the broad stairs together half an hour later, "don' sit down any more dan is nec'ssary, befo' de comp'ny comes. I want dat Mis' Potter dat's so



high an' mighty in her feelings to be jess bowed down wid admiration; an' when once a dress like dat is squashed, why, it look squashed—dat's all."

Promptly at six o'clock the first guest arrived. It was Bartley Pearson, who had closed the post-office at three o'clock to go home and ink the seams of his best coat, and iron a white tie. Mr. Pearson's moon-shaped face wore its most interested expression, as he was ushered into the library after his coat and hat had been taken by Sylvanus, not to mention a pair of overshoes and several yards of knitted scarf.

"You needn't trouble to set those in any special place," he said graciously to Sylvanus, "for my name is painted in red on the inside of the soles of my overshoes, on a band in my hat, and on the hanging strap of my overcoat. The muffler I can easily identify."

"So can anybody else that's ever had the opportunities and experiences of seeing you in the winter solstitch," remarked Sylvanus as he put Mr. Pearson's garments in the big hall closet, emptied for the guests; but his mother reproved him sharply.

"Don't you begin criticizing de guests, 'Vanus," she said in a tone of warning. "You better keep dat mind o' yours on not stretching roun' in dat suit ob Mr. Jack's, fo' de seams is perilous nigh to bu'sting al-



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ready ; I's got to see 'bout reducing yo' flesh soon's dis holiday time's over. Hurry up ! dar's somebody else coming to de piazza."

Mrs. Potter and her husband were the next guests to arrive, but they were closely followed by others of the townspeople. All Nancy's special friends were there, beside many others who were the fortunate parents of children old enough to be brought to the Christmas party. The little girl who had carried the bottle of spring water for Nancy to drink on her memorable ride in the freight car was there with her mother, in a bright plaid dress, her pride shining from her eyes ; the freckle-faced boy who had held Jessie was there, too, his round features scrubbed and glistening from soap and an extra application of cold cream. Mr. Hobbs, Mr. Lord and Mr. Lamson were also among the guests.

"Miss Nancy treats me more politely than I treated her the first time she came to visit me," said Mr. Lamson to Marguerite, with a laugh. "Is your grandfather any more resigned to the Beaumont Block?" he asked Nancy with a cautious glance at the Admiral, standing patiently under a fire of advice as to his "rheumatism" from Mrs. Potter.

Nancy shook her head.

"Not much more," she said ; "but my brother Jack



doesn't mind a bit. And the Compton boys think Stone's is the best shop they ever saw."

"I heard they approved of it," said Mr. Lamson. "Now, Miss Nancy, will your grandfather object to having a little account of this gathering in 'The Potterville Clarion'? I might head it 'A Revival of Old-Time Hospitality. Admiral Beaumont entertains the townspeople at the historic home.' How do you think that would strike him?"

"Please ask Jack," said Nancy. "He can make grandfather like anything, I think. Now please excuse Marguerite and me, for we must form the children into a procession; the parlor doors are to be opened in about five minutes."

It was a gay little procession which formed, with Dick Compton at its head, his herald's trumpet in his hand, Nancy and Marguerite close behind him, and the freckle-faced boy with Roger next in line. Dick was close to the parlor door, but the procession wound crisscross around the hall, and over into the library, ending with Mr. Hobbs and Mr. Lamson.

"See Bart Pearson in there with the children, among the first," said Mr. Hobbs tolerantly to his companion. "I suppose he's just as keen after his Christmas present and the first sight of the tree as when he was a boy."



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Bart's kept just about the same all his days; never really grew up. Hi there! Hear that trumpet!"

At a given signal—a preliminary squeak of the parlor door—little Dick raised his trumpet and blew a brave and thrilling blast. The door opened, and there stood Santa Claus, bowing to the company from the centre of a veritable greenwood. A green cloth covered the carpet, and through the whole length of the room were scattered little fir trees, the tubs in which they were placed concealed by branches of pine and spruce. The walls were festooned with evergreen, and sprays of holly glistened here and there. In the middle of the miniature wood was a tall tree, lighted by many candles and hung with gay tinsel and sparkling things of many kinds.

There were festoons of pop-corn on all the trees, and loops of brightly colored paper. There were stockings of open mesh through which candy might be plainly seen; there were horns and whistles and puzzles—dolls and picture-books and games.

"I understand there is a tree for each family present, whether it consists of one member or five or six," announced Santa Claus; "these trees are to be taken home by the guests and kept as long as they can be of any pleasure or service; after which, I hope each



family will burn its tree, and not throw it on the ash heap," said Santa Claus, "for most of us know how sad that would make the little trees feel. And now to business. May I ask Mr. Bartley Pearson to step forward and receive his gift?"

"I expect he thought Bart would explode if he was kept waiting," whispered Mrs. Potter to her husband. "He's so full of curiosity. What do you suppose is in that little box? You step over and see him open it, why don't you?"

For more than an hour there was the sound of laughter and many childish voices in the old house. At last the Admiral, still valiantly smiling, but tired out, retreated to the library, and that was the signal for the departure of the guests, the first move being made with much elegant precision by Mrs. Potter. The others followed quickly in her train, and in a short time the last sleigh had jingled down the road, and the last merry good-night had been called back through the frosty air.

Only Julia Frost and her kittens remained in the parlor, under the big tree.

"Hide now," commanded Julia, "and we may sleep here under the branches all night. It's a rare chance."

The kittens obeyed her, and Aunt Sylvia's old eyes



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failed to notice the quivering of the branches that sheltered Julia and her family.

Little Dick, his coat and moccasins clasped in his arms, his trumpet sticking from a pocket and his silver star, a trifle awry but still gleaming, was carried up to bed by Santa Claus.

"I know you now," he said. "You are Mr. Jack ; but last night I thought you were a truly Santa Claus, and I'm glad—I—did," ended little Dick with as wide a yawn as his small mouth could give.

"I'm glad too," said Nancy, standing in the hall with Marguerite. "Don't you think it was a pleasant party, grandfather ?"

"It was a delightful occasion," said Admiral Beaumont, "and I wish to thank our guests and you, too, my dear, for making it so."

"And dat dress isn't but jess a little teeny mite squashed," said Aunt Sylvia as she recounted the joys of the evening. "And you were Beaumonty-mannered enough to please yo' grandfather an' all his grandfathers, my lamb. But do you know who you look jess like all dis evening ?"

"Oh, Aunt Sylvy," whispered Nancy. "Did I look like her ?"

Aunt Sylvia nodded.



“Jess fo’ all de worl’ like yo’ lady mother, you looked,” she said; “an’ you couldn’ look like nuffin’ sweeter, no matter if you s’arch de worl’ ober, my lamb.”



## CHAPTER VIII

### ROGER WINS A STAR

MALCOLM, Ted and Roger had a great deal to talk over that night. There was, in fact, so much to be said, that Malcolm, after a short consultation with Ted, extended an invitation to Roger which nearly took his breath away, for it was the first of the sort he had ever received.

Roger had reluctantly gone through the door which led to his room from the one occupied by his brothers. Like all the rooms, it had a second door, leading into the hall, but it was much more social to go and come through Malcolm's room, Roger thought, and it preserved the character of a "suite" on which Aunt Sylvia insisted.

He was just ready to get into bed when Malcolm's face, his spectacles making two spots of light, appeared in the doorway.

"As long as it's Christmas, and you've been with us in everything all day, kid, you may come in and bunk with us, if you like," said Malcolm in an offhand way.



"There are a few more points we want to talk over. You'll have to sleep on the edge of the bed, but I don't suppose you'll mind that."

Mind it! It seemed to Roger that they must hear his heart bumping against his side with joy ; but he was careful to reply in a tone as nearly like Malcolm's as he could make it.

"I don't mind if I do," he said carelessly, and strolled with unhurried step into his brothers' room.

He had little more than the edge of the bed, as Malcolm had warned him, but what of that? It was evident that his brothers now regarded him as fully grown and able to enter into their plans and opinions ; that was more than enough for Roger. When the wonderful resources of Stone's Ten Cent Store, in the Beaumont Block, were recounted, Roger took his full share of the conversation. It was he who remembered certain small hammers with bright red handles, accompanied by boxes of assorted nails, which they had all noticed.

"I'm glad you spoke of them," said Malcolm ; "a hammer like that and a box of nails comes in handy for a fellow now and then. If you and I go to that boys' camp next summer, Ted, we'll probably need just such things in our outfit. Now Christmas is over I can af-



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ford to buy a few things for myself out of my allowance."

"I tell you what," said Ted, "I think before we go home we'd better look over that stock pretty thoroughly, and buy what we need. We might ask Jack Beaumont's advice ; he has a lot of sense."

"I think he's fine," said Roger. "I saw a screw-driver there, too ; it had a hollow handle with three or four different things you could fit in ; a kind of gimlet, and a sharp thing like a knife. It looked pretty good to me."

Malcolm raised his head from the pillow and looked through the darkness, past Ted, at Roger.

"You're a sharp little chap," he said graciously. "What do you say, Ted, to asking father to let him go to camp the second year with us, if we like it ?"

"I call it a pretty good idea," said Ted.

"All right, that's settled," said Malcolm ; "now let's shut up and go to sleep ; there's a good deal to be done to-morrow, you know. Good-night, kid."

"Good-night," said Roger, his heart bumping at his side again.

Malcolm and Ted were soon asleep, but Roger lay there on the edge of the bed, thinking and planning what he would do to keep the high regard in which his



brothers now held him. Roger was of slighter build than Malcolm or Ted, but he was as straight as a little rod, with muscles that were like wires, and most unusual strength for a boy of his age.

As he lay there, he heard a sound like the opening of a door; a door directly opposite theirs, Roger would have said, had he been asked; his hearing was remarkably acute.

"But it can't be that door," he thought, wondering a little; "that's the door into the room where Dick sleeps; nobody'd open that."

He listened again; for a moment it seemed as if something brushed along the wall; then all was still again; but Roger sat up on his elbow.

"It's my imagination—that's what it is, I suppose," he said to himself; then, suddenly, a thought popped into his mind.

"When Dick was three, he used to get up and trot around in his sleep, once in a while; he hasn't done it for two years, but he might," thought Roger; "and he showed me that door this morning—the queer old latch on it. And father and mother are probably sound asleep. I'd better see."

He slid out of bed—an easy matter—and wrapping himself in a great blanket Aunt Sylvia had laid on a



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near-by chair, "jess in case 'twould be needed fo' extry," he stole through the doorway to his own room, and noiselessly lifted the latch, and opened the door into the hall. Then he listened again.

At first he heard nothing; then there was the sound of a little voice, talking softly.

"That's just what's happened," said Roger. "Now I must go and look out for him. No use to wake mother up, for she was tired, and I can see to Dick all right. I remember mother said he mustn't be waked up, but I needn't speak to him or let him see me unless he wakes himself. If he does, I'd be there, so he wouldn't be frightened. I can peek down and see where he is."

The hall was dark, and when Roger, having felt his way along to the head of the stairs, looked down, at first he could see nothing. When his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, he could descry little Dick in his white flannel nightgown, sitting on the rug before the fireplace.

"He looks too close," thought Roger. "Why, I believe he must have pushed the fender away. My! I hope there isn't any fire left!"

He leaned far over, so that he could see the whole fireplace.



"There are some sparks," said Roger to himself. "I must go down. He won't see or hear me if he's asleep. What's he saying?"

"This is a beautiful fireplace," the child's voice chanted softly. "A beautiful fireplace; a beautiful fireplace!"

"Maybe he's awake," thought Roger, and he stepped carefully down the broad stairs.

But although one of the old boards creaked under his feet, little Dick's face did not turn from the fire.

"The biggest fireplace I ever saw," he chanted on; "the biggest I ever saw; the biggest I ever saw."

"He'll catch cold," said Roger, "and then what would mother say? I must manage to put this blanket around him."

He unwound it from his own shoulders and crept along the hall toward his little brother. Suddenly there was a puff of wind down the chimney; a fragment of wood, alive with fire, was blown out and alighted on Dick's nightgown. There was a quick blaze, a frightened cry, and then, before he was fairly awake, little Dick was smothered in a great blanket and rolled over and over on the rug.

But the cry had wakened many in the house. There were moments of confusion, and startled calls while



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Roger, panting, rolled the little figure on the rug. It was all over ; the fire was out, and Dick was safe, with only two or three slight burns, when his mother ran down the stairs, followed by the General, Nancy and Marguerite, Jack, the boys, Aunt Sylvia and Betty, and the candles were lighted.

"I couldn't tell you what was the matter because I hadn't time to stop," explained Roger to his mother and father. "You see he'd walked down here in his sleep."

His mother took Dick in her lap, but she kept her arm around Roger, while Aunt Sylvia, half crying, but wholly in her element, brought soft cotton and a wonderful old salve, and dressed first Dick's burns, and then Roger's, for the boy's hands had suffered cruelly.

"I was in bed with Malcolm and Ted," said Roger, looking up at his father with a brave little crooked smile as Aunt Sylvia wound the soft cloth around his fingers. "That's why I heard so plainly ; the door is just opposite, you know."

"Yes, I know," said the General ; "and I imagine Malcolm and Ted hadn't given you such a large share of the bed that you were any too luxurious. I had older brothers myself."



“Oh, I was perfectly comfortable,” said Roger hastily; “indeed I was, father.”

“That’s good,” said the General; “and now I’ll give you something else to think of in case you shouldn’t fall asleep this time the minute your head touches the sheet—or perhaps the boys may spare you a little edge of a pillow, on this occasion. Miss Nancy, may I confer with you a moment?”

The household watched while the short conference was held, and they saw Nancy’s face of delight, when the General turned from her to Roger again.

“When I stepped up-stairs a moment ago,” said the General, “it was to get a little pin which came into my hands some years ago; it is a sort of medal, star-shaped, as you see,” and the General held up a star of dull silver, on a crimson ribbon, so they might all look at it. “I did not wish to interfere with Miss Nancy’s order of decorations, but she has graciously permitted me, in view of the somewhat unusual circumstances, to present you with this [star in place of the red one which she would have awarded you. Step forward.”

Roger stepped forward, his face pale with pain and excitement, and stood looking up at his father while the General pinned the star on his breast.

“It is customary to shake the hand of a newly-deco-



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rated soldier, when his friends congratulate him," said the General, "but in this case that ceremony will have to be omitted." He looked down at Roger's hands swathed in bandages, and laid his own hand tenderly on the boy's shoulder.

"Kiss your mother, my lad, and then off to bed with you," he said.

"I'm so proud to know you, Roger," whispered Nancy as she said good-night.

"Just what any boy would have done, that's all," said Roger as they filed up-stairs. "Isn't it, Malcolm?"

"I think that's about so," said Malcolm with an uncommonly subdued air.

"About the way most boys would have done, probably," said Ted.

"You take the inside of the bed this time, kid," said Malcolm; "and we'll keep off your hands. Let's see the bandages again. You're going to be a lucky one, isn't he, Ted?"

"Luckiest one of our family, that's what I think," said Ted gloomily. "How are you and I going to earn our stars, that's what I'd like to know. I forgot to say good-night all over again to them, just now, and father never reminded me."



“So did I,” said Malcolm. “We’re the unlucky pair!”

“That’s what I think,” said Ted. “We might as well go to sleep.”

“But we’re glad for you, kid,” said Malcolm generously. “Maybe we can get father to let you go up to camp for a day or two this summer.”

“Yes, maybe we can,” said Ted.

“Oh, thank you,” said Roger fervently.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE WOOD ROAD

THE good times which all the children had in the days that followed Christmas were different from any they had enjoyed before. There was coasting such as Malcolm, Ted and Roger had dreamed of, but never seen. Jack's old "double runner" took the entire party down hills, over fences and walls buried in snow, along smooth roads and across the little pond where at other times they skated.

Even Mrs. Compton was persuaded to try the coasting on two or three occasions, and she returned to the General with rosy cheeks which her husband pinched and admired. The General himself would have enjoyed the coasting, Malcolm, Ted and Roger thought, but as the Admiral was debarred from all such sport, his old friend refused it.

He did not refuse a walk on the morning after the ice-storm, however. The sleet had fallen all the night before, and when at last the morning came, and the sun broke through the clouds, it shone on trees and shrubs sparkling like diamonds, and on roads and hill-



sides covered, over the soft white below, with a glittering crust.

"Now you wants to take de comp'ny over to de aidge ob de wood, fo' de wind starts up," said Aunt Sylvia to Jack when he waylaid her in the hall after breakfast to compliment her on her waffles, and put in a plea for some dainties remembered from his boyhood. "'Tisn't often we gets a ice-storm now'days; weather is tame an' common to what it used to be. An' fo' benighted folks dat lib in de city all de time, dis 'pears like a special opp'tunity. You get 'em started off jess as soon as you can, fo' de wind's bound to rise, befo' long."

"I don't see any sign of wind rising," objected the young man, for the pleasure of seeing Aunt Sylvia's chin elevated, and her spectacles drawn down on her nose. "Oh, I'll mind, Aunt Sylvia," he added hastily. "I'll start them as soon as ever I can."

It was really not more than half an hour later when the General and Jack marshaled their party, and trudged off down the road. Mrs. Compton and Dick had stayed behind with the Admiral, who had promised to tell the boy an old story of the sea while his mother had one of her long talks with Aunt Sylvia. These talks were generally held in



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the kitchen while Betty was at work up-stairs, setting the rooms in order. She was always permitted to make the beds and do the dusting, but when all was completed she was obliged to accompany Aunt Sylvia on a tour through the rooms, when praise was scanty, and her faults and omissions were freely pointed out.

The General walked first with Jack; then came Nancy and Marguerite, and behind them the boys, all three abreast, Roger between his brothers. He was still a lucky hero in their eyes, but he bore his honors so modestly that even critical elder brothers could find no fault. In fact, it appeared that Roger much preferred to have nothing said about his midnight exploit, outside the family.

"How did you like Mrs. Potter's running out to congratulate you, yesterday?" asked Malcolm as they walked along.

"Made me feel cheap," said Roger in a disgusted tone. "Jack says Sylvanus must have let it leak out when she stopped him in the morning. He gave Sylvanus a piece of his mind, too—letting out family affairs like that."

"'Twould make a fellow feel cheap, I should think," remarked Malcolm, to whom the idea was new and rather pleasing.



"Exactly the way it would make him feel," said Ted, with conviction.

They trudged along over the glistening road, then in through a winding wood path, up and up to the crest of a little hill where stood a grove of maples with a background of firs. The trees were far enough apart for the sun to filter through to the ground beneath them, even in the summer when the foliage was thick. Now it turned every great branch and tiny twig into a thing of wondrous beauty. The little company stood spellbound at the entrance to the wood.

"Isn't this like fairy-land, Marguerite?" asked Nancy. "Can't you imagine them—the fairies—hundreds of them, hiding in the trees, all in shimmering, sparkling white, dressed for a fairy wedding? And their knights with glittering spears and lances are hiding too. I can see their armor gleam."

"So can I," said Marguerite, as they walked slowly in under the canopy of white.

For a moment no one spoke; even the three boys gazed silently up at the wonderful network of interlaced branches.

"Listen!" said Nancy softly. "Don't you hear the swords and spears clashing, way off? They are having a fairy battle somewhere in this wood."



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"That's a curious sound," said the General. "It certainly does give the effect of clashing steel in the distance."

"It is the wind of which Aunt Sylvia warned me," said Jack. "We must start back at once, I'm afraid. This enchanted wood is apt to be dangerous at a time like this."

They retraced their steps at once, though with regret. The clashing grew louder and louder, and by the time they had reached the outer edge of fairy-land again, there was another sound added—an ominous creaking and groaning, and there were two or three sounds like pistol-shots.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," Nancy said, as she stopped a moment to gaze back at her enchanted wood; "it will never be just the same again; the most powerful knight—'Sir Wind,' Aunt Sylvia calls him—will destroy a great many of my beautiful fairy warriors, before the battle is over."

She stood with clasped hands, looking up at the swaying branches; Marguerite had gone a few steps ahead to answer some question put by her father; Roger was walking by Jack's side for the moment. Malcolm and Ted waited, politely, for their hostess to finish her farewell to the wood. They gazed at her



with some curiosity, and their elbows touched each other.

Then all at once a great blast of wind came tearing through the wood and straight at Nancy's head, from behind her back, it flung a great ice-laden branch, torn from a tree on the instant.

Nancy did not see or hear it coming, but Malcolm and Ted, undecorated but valiant knights of no fairy origin, sprang toward her. There was no time for planning this rescue party; the first Nancy knew of her danger was that she was being thrown, face downward, on the snow, and that the great branch went crashing by, to land just beyond her, one end slightly grazing her shoulder as it passed.

She was unhurt, but Malcolm and Ted were the proud owners of some honorable bruises. Ted's forehead and one cheek were badly scratched, and Malcolm's nose was decorated with a long cut, while his eye-glasses, carried off by the branch, were splintered beyond all repair.

"We couldn't save you very politely," said Malcolm when he had plucked Nancy from the snow with more zeal than tenderness, as the rest of the party came hurrying back; for the rescue had not been accomplished in silence, by any means.



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"No, we couldn't stop to be very polite," said Ted.  
"If we had, you might have been killed."

"She'd have been knocked out of her senses, anyway," said Malcolm to Jack.

"She wouldn't have had a sense left if that branch had hit where it aimed," said Ted.

The boys applied large white handkerchiefs to their wounds and beamed frankly on the company, panting from their recent exertions.

Nancy, who was being brushed off by Jack and Marguerite, smiled at them demurely.

"The stars are all ready, waiting to be pinned on, as soon as we get home," she said.

"Oh, well—no hurry about that," said Malcolm nonchalantly.

"No—any time will do for that," said Ted.

"Marguerite," said the General, "I trust you have not set your heart on receiving any decoration, for I am beginning to feel that it may be difficult to live up to such a distinguished family of children."

"You needn't worry one bit about me, father," said Marguerite. "I shan't ever win so much as a rubber button by my valor."

"Then I am content," said the General, drawing Marguerite's hand through his arm. "May I have the



pleasure of your company on the homeward march while Colonel Beaumont escorts his sister, and the three lieutenants follow in regular order?"

"You may," said Marguerite, and she endeavored to match her step to her father's stride. "Don't you think, really, we have a pretty good set of boys, father?"

"They'll do," said the General as he bore down the hilly road; "they'll do fairly well, I think. Let's get home and see what their mother will say."



## CHAPTER X

### AUNT SYLVIA'S SECRETS

BESIDE the joys of coasting, snow-shoeing, skating and sleighing, the young people had one whole day in the house, while a great snow-storm raged outside. Many things had been left especially for this day, which had been foretold by Aunt Sylvia, and came two days before the departure of the guests.

There was the secret passage to be thoroughly explored ; the treasures of the garret, too, were inspected by the boys with much interest, for there was a trunk filled with uniforms and war relics, and wrapped in silver paper was a worn and tattered old flag. Then there were photographs to be taken by Marguerite ; she had reserved the "portraits," as she called them, for this stormy day, and she was quite severe with her sitters.

"Aunt Sylvia is my very best sitter," she announced to the family in the late afternoon, after a session with the Admiral. "She sits perfectly still, exactly where I put her. You and father playing chess will be pretty



good, I think, Admiral Beaumont, except that you both moved a little too soon. But in your separate portraits, you both sneezed!" said Marguerite reproachfully.

The Admiral chuckled, but the General took his reproof meekly.

"To put a man of my age in a direct draught, my dear, and place a large book in his hands, and then charge him to 'hold it just so' for five minutes, or a trifle less," said the General, "seems pretty harsh treatment to me."

"You're an old dear!" said Marguerite. "Now I'll run up-stairs and take one of mother with Dick, and one without, and then I'll be done."

"Thank goodness!" breathed the General. "This having your pictures taken is an awful tax on the muscles, eh, Admiral?"

The Admiral stroked his lame knee and permitted himself a slight grimace.

In the evening they played games and ate roasted chestnuts, pop-corn, and a wonderful concoction made by Aunt Sylvia, and called by her "Butt'nut S'prise."

They were playing "Telegrams" when Aunt Sylvia brought in the big platter heaped with the candy; trying to make telegrams which should give reasons for de-



clining an invitation to a house-party ; the ten words of the telegram included the fictitious name of the sender, and must begin with the letters of the word Providence in regular order.

Marguerite's eyes were roaming the library in the vain hope of finding some idea which would help her to complete her telegram. As far as she had gone, it read "Peeled raw onions ; very ill ; doctor ——" and there Marguerite's ingenuity had failed her.

"You've just saved my life, Aunt Sylvia," she said, as she took a piece of candy, smiling up at the old woman ; "your cap made me think of a nurse, and—well, it was just what I needed to finish my telegram."

"I don't know what you's talkin' 'bout, Miss Marguerite," said Aunt Sylvia tolerantly as she passed on with the platter, "but soon as your writing is done, you take a bite out o' dat butt'nut s'prise, and see how you likes it."

Marguerite hastily scribbled "engaged nurse," and signed her name, "Christine Evergreen," and then took a good bite of the candy.

"Oh, Aunt Sylvia!" she cried, clasping the rest of her piece of "butternut surprise" to her heart, with both hands, "I never, no never, tasted anything so delicious as this! If we had some of this at my school



for luncheons, they wouldn't be able to sell us anything else."

"I don't see what would be the matter with boys having something like this," said Malcolm, as he took his first bite. "It's the very best I ever ate," he added solemnly.

"Best I ever ate, too," said Ted.

"I never ate anything else that was half as good," said Roger.

Aunt Sylvia marched on, head stiffly erect, after setting the platter on the table near Nancy's chair, but when she reached the doorway she turned and made a sweeping obeisance to the company.

"I's proud to please you," she said; "Mis' Gen'l Compton, might I hab a word in yo' ear, when you is at liberty?"

"Certainly, Aunt Sylvia," said Mrs. Compton, and within ten minutes she slipped quietly from the room and out to the kitchen.

"Aunt Sylvia," said Nancy when she was being tucked in for the second time that night, "you seem to have a great many things to say to Mrs. Compton. Aren't you going to tell me any of them, too?"

"Yes, I's gwine tell you all ob dose secrets Mis' Gen'l Compton and I's had, some day," said Aunt



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Sylvia in her most soothing voice. "But befo' dat, I's gwine tell you 'bout de way I earn de money fo' dat dress ob yo's; don't you rec'lec' dat, my lamb?"

"Indeed I do," said Nancy, "when the company's gone, Aunt Sylvia, you promised."

"I always 'tends to hol' to my promises," said Aunt Sylvia, "and has done so, from a little teeny gal. How ole you s'pose I is, honey? I wonders consid'able 'bout it, sometimes. I's 'bout de age ob de Admiral, I reckon, but he don' like no mention ob ages, so I hesitate 'bout axin' him."

"You are just the right age for a dear Aunt Sylvia to be," said Nancy, pressing her soft lips to the cheek so near her own. "And day after to-morrow, when the company is gone"—Nancy gave a little involuntary sigh, "you and I must make great plans for the rest of the winter."

"So we shall," said Aunt Sylvia; "grand plans we'll make, so de winter'll fly away fast and de spring'll be right hyah befo' we know it."

Outside Nancy's door, she shook her head, and her old figure drooped for a moment.

"'Tain' right fo' my lamb to be hyah all alone, jess an ole cullud pusson an' a mess ob animals fo' comp'ny, besides her grandfather," said Aunt Sylvia. "Co'se it





"HOW OLE YOU S'POSE I IS, HONEY?"







ain' right, and I's gwine get de money so she can go down to de city an' study 'longside o' Miss Marguerite. An' Mis' Gen'l Compton will look after her fine."

Aunt Sylvia stopped half-way up the little flight of stairs which led to her room, her hand on the worn railing.

"But what is dis yer place gwine to be like when she's gone?" Aunt Sylvia asked herself in a frightened whisper. "Lonesome as de chu'chyard—dat's what!" She gave herself a fierce shake and lifted her head.

"Selfish ole t'ing!" she scolded, under her breath. "Isn't you got enough to do to keep de Admiral half-way contented, an' bring up dat 'Vanus like he ought to be brung, an' keep dat Betty out o' de ways ob shif'lessness? An' when de winter an' spring is slipped away, doesn't de long summer come, when my lamb would be hyah at home again, full o' knowledge an' sweetness, jess filling dis ole house wid sunshine? You put yo' mind on dat, an' let de troubles in 'tween take care ob demselves."

She had a good many private words with Mrs. Compton the next day, but Nancy was too busy enjoying the "last whole day" with Marguerite and the boys (not to mention her dear brother) to wonder at or



notice these hurried consultations. At dusk when she and Marguerite were coming out of the Comptons' "suite," after a frolic with little Dick who was going early to bed to be fresh for the morrow's journey, they met Aunt Sylvia carrying a large pasteboard box. She made no explanation as she bore it into Mrs. Compton's room, beyond a murmured "goodies" in Nancy's ear. The little girl was delighted that the guests were to carry off some of Aunt Sylvia's dainties, but thought no more of it.

The next morning all was excitement, and when the guests had gone away on the train, and Nancy was waving her good-bye, with eyes which were a little misty in spite of all she could do, she turned to find Jack beside her.

"Oh, Jack! why! I said good-bye to you last of all," cried Nancy.

"Yes," said Jack, "but they all knew I had planned to stay another day with you, for a surprise," and her face well repaid him for the sacrifice of a little visit he had been asked to make.

"When a fellow has a sister like you, Nancy," said Jack that evening as they sat together before the fire in the hall for a long talk after the Admiral had gone to bed, "he wants to see all he can of her. I suspect



it will be a bit lonesome for you after the good times you've been having. What will you do with yourself all day long? There's quite a stretch between this and the spring term at the Potterville Academy."

"Oh, I shall do a great many things," said Nancy, her hands locked, and her eyes looking dreamily into the fire. "Grandfather teaches me all sorts of things, you know; Mrs. Potter says I'm 'well informed in a scattering way,' Jack, and I suppose you know what she means."

Jack laughed at Nancy's face, which was not quite sober in spite of all her efforts to control it.

"I fancy I understand exactly what she means," he said. "You have arithmetic, history and geography according to what happens to interest grandfather in the newspaper and set him to talking. And you have literature and philosophy from the library, also according to what happens to be in grandfather's mind at the time, and astronomy and botany by a system of his own, depending largely on the weather and the season of the year. How is that for a guess, Nancy?"

"You are a wonderful guesser," said Nancy demurely. "And grandfather really thinks my spring terms at school are unnecessary; it is only because you and Aunt Sylvia have insisted, that he is at all con-



tented to have me go. Grandmother never went to school, you see."

Jack set the Beaumont jaw firmly, though not to trouble Nancy.

"Aunt Sylvia and I are in the right of it, Nancy," he said, "and I've been thinking about something ever since I came home this time. Another year, when I'm through with college, you might be in the city with the Comptons and go to school with Marguerite, for say four months, from about this time of the year, and see girls of your own age and the right kind. How would you like that, little sister?"

For a moment Nancy looked as if a wonderful vision had suddenly come close to her; then her face changed, and she shook her head.

"I couldn't, Jack dear," she said. "I'm all grandfather has—that is of our family—for company, and he'd be too lonely; and then there's Aunt Sylvia, and Jessie. And most of all, Jack, there isn't any money."

"Why, grandfather told me he was getting on finely, now I'm looking out for my college expenses," said Jack, who had the Beaumont distaste for applying strict mathematical calculations to family finances; "there ought to be plenty for you."

Nancy laughed at his puzzled face. Even her grand-



father's "scattering" system of teaching arithmetic had not destroyed the aptitude for numbers and the common sense she inherited from her Frost ancestors.

"There isn't, Jack dear," she said quietly, and she patted his hand in the quaint little motherly way she sometimes took with her tall brother. "There's only just enough to keep things going on here the way they must, to please grandfather."

"Of course the wages for Aunt Sylvia and Betty and Sylvanus take quite a little," said Jack thoughtfully knitting his handsome brows. "But they are all needed. I can see that."

"Oh, Jack," said Nancy. "Betty has very little, because she's learning; and Aunt Sylvia will only let Sylvanus take half what he's worth, because she says it is a privilege for him to be here with us, on the old place. And Aunt Sylvia herself—she has what grandmother always gave her, but——" Nancy's eyes brimmed over then; she must not betray Aunt Sylvia's confidence; if the Admiral had not told Jack the real state of affairs, it was partly because he did not understand himself. Nancy knew that some of the money paid so scrupulously every month to her old mammy was used to pay household expenses.

"I know—you mean she gives you things—like the



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pretty gown she helped buy," said Jack. "She loved to do it, of course, dear old Aunt Sylvia, for her 'lamb'; she has the true devotion to the family she has served so long. But that can't have made such a very big hole, little sister. I'll venture to say she has a good sum laid away safely—must have, you know, after all these years. Everything will come out right; don't you worry your little head about money. Look at me; see those muscles; feel my arm, Nancy."

Nancy felt, and exclaimed with unfeigned admiration, and after a minute the brother and sister went up the old stairs together, Jack's arm around her till he left her at her door.

"Sleep well, little girl," he said affectionately, as he bade her good-night; "and remember you have a big brother who means to look out for you, as long as he lives."



## CHAPTER XI

### GINGERBREAD

NANCY smiled lovingly at the remembrance of Jack's confident words, when the door of her room was shut. There sat Aunt Sylvia, sound asleep in the rocking-chair. Nancy stepped softly to the drawer which held her best treasures, and taking out her mother's picture, she slipped it under her pillow, and began to undress, so quietly, that it did not surprise her to have Aunt Sylvia still apparently sound asleep when she crept into bed. She did not suspect for one moment that her light step had aroused her old mammy, and that Aunt Sylvia's eyes, so tightly closed when Nancy turned around, had seen her take the picture from its box.

When she was in bed, Aunt Sylvia yawned, straightened herself, and blinked, as if greatly amazed at the sight of her charge sleepily smiling at her.

"You cert'nly is the feath'riest stepping chile dat eber I knowed," said Aunt Sylvia, as she tucked her in, and Nancy was well pleased as she snuggled down for her night's sleep.



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She said good-bye to Jack with a rosy, cheerful little face the next morning, and held her hand over something which hung from a delicate silver chain around her neck, as she watched the train until it disappeared. It was a small silver heart with the Beaumont crest on its under side, and below the crest, "J to N."

"Did you think I'd give you just what I gave Marguerite, and nothing else, little sister?" Jack had asked her as he clasped the chain around her neck, and held her for a moment, his hands on her shoulders, while he gave her a gentle shake. "After that wonderful fob you made for me, too! I'm really surprised at you, Nancy!"

She was smiling happily over his words as she rode back with Sylvanus, Ezra stepping briskly along over the snow, his bells jingling a cheerful tune. Sylvanus sat stiffly erect until the last of the village houses had been passed, touching his hat-brim with the whip—of which Ezra never felt a touch—whenever the sleigh met or passed one of Nancy's friends, afoot or driving. When the last house had been left behind, Sylvanus relaxed in his attitude a trifle, and turned a little in his seat. Then he coughed.

"We've had a splendid visit from our friends, haven't we, Sylvanus?" asked Nancy, who could never bear to



disappoint him, in spite of her grandfather's admonitions to "keep him in his proper place."

"Yes, Miss Nancy, that we cert'nly have had," he answered eagerly. "The blessings of fortuitous weather and health has been ours, and moreover, Miss Nancy, the guests were ladies and gentlemen to the extreme, so that it was a pleasurable opportunity to do any little exercises for them."

"The boys told me they never expected again to have such a beautiful polish on their shoes as you gave them, till their next visit," said Nancy.

Sylvanus waved his whip hand with a wide sweep.

"They spoke of the matter to me, Miss Nancy," he said in a voice which he endeavored to make sufficiently humble. "But the truths of the matter are, that when shoes have been treated so devoid of all carefulness, as those shoes of the young gentlemen had been treated and used, Miss Nancy, to make them presume the proper appearance is almost beyond hopes."

"It was a great pleasure to grandfather to think you attended to them so well," said Nancy; "particularly as he knows you got up early in the morning to do them, and you don't like to get up early, we know; or have you changed?"

Nancy was half laughing, but for a moment she



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imagined that Sylvanus gave her a quick, apprehensive glance, before he turned his attention to Ezra.

"I thank you, Miss Nancy," he said gravely. "There are some difficulties about my awaking in the early morning, but I hope never to have them prove interferences with my duty to the Admiral."

"No indeed," said Nancy warmly. "You are always on hand when grandfather is ready to get up, I know. You are a great comfort to him, Sylvanus."

"Thank you, Miss Nancy," he replied again, but for the remainder of the drive he looked straight ahead, although he answered Nancy's questions with due respect.

"Sylvanus seems more grown up than he ever did before, Aunt Sylvia," said Nancy that afternoon, as she sat in the sewing-room with her old mammy; and then she repeated her conversation about the shoes. "I was afraid afterward perhaps I'd hurt his feelings by referring to his being a little lazy in the mornings," said Nancy; "perhaps he has outgrown it, all at once."

Her eyes were bent on her work, a delicate old handkerchief which she was darning with the finest thread, and she therefore failed to see the look Aunt Sylvia gave her—a look which bore a distinct resemblance to the one she had caught on the face of Sylvanus, on the



homeward drive that morning. But when Aunt Sylvia spoke, her voice was as calm as usual.

“Don’t you worry ’bout dat, my lamb,” she said; “sometimes I find dat boy feeling kind o’ biggety, dese days, but den I takes him in hand, prompt, and he gets right whar he b’longs, in no time ’t all. I’ll ’tend to him. High time he growed up, if eber he’s gwine grow up; I reckon dat boy mus’ be most in de thirties, or somewhar nigh, dese days.”

“Do you ever think perhaps he ought to go to some one else, Aunt Sylvia?” asked Nancy wistfully. “Mr. Hobbs says he ‘has a great knack’ with horses, and he could probably earn a good deal of money every week if he went to live with rich people.”

“Huh! What would dat boy do wid mo’ money?” inquired Aunt Sylvia scornfully. “I has to gib it out to him by ten centses, now, fo’ to keep him from getting me an’ hisself in de porehouse. He ain’ got any uses fo’ money, my lamb. An’ de Admiral wouldn’t find any boy dat could be scolded an’ dis’plined so free as ’Vanus; de Admiral would miss him, true as dis worl’; an’ ’Vanus is proud to be hyah.”

“Ah, Aunt Sylvia, I don’t know what I should do without you,” said Nancy, as she folded the little handkerchief, so beautifully mended, and then clasped



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her hands over her silver heart swinging it gently back and forth. "Wouldn't this be a good time to tell me how you earned the money to help pay for that lovely dress you and Mrs. Compton gave me? Please, Aunt Sylvia."

"Good time as any, I 'spects," admitted the old woman. "Getting kind o' twilighty fo' eyes de age ob mine. S'posing we turn our chairs roun' so's we'll be facing out to'ds de sky, an' see all its pretty looks while de light's fading—so—dat's right. Now I'll tell you jess how 'twas, honey."

Aunt Sylvia leaned back in her low rocking-chair, and closed her eyes; then she opened them, and reaching out for one of Nancy's hands, she took it between both of hers and held it as she talked.

"You see I knowed my lamb got to hab dat dress some way," said Aunt Sylvia, "an' de money wasn't on han' to get it. Provisions is mighty high, dese days, an' do de best we can, we's all got to eat, to keep up our stren'th; an' so de money goes, little teeny bit hyah—little teeny bit thar—an' 'tis all gone! But I kep' studying 'bout it, an' studying 'bout it, an' I said to myself, if dere's any way I could get some extra, why dere 'twould be extra."

"And while I was studying 'bout it, one day when I



was in Potterville, 'long wid 'Vanus, I met up wid dat Mr. Lord, an' he cert'nly is a mighty well-'tentioned man, dat Mr. Lord, an' I like de way he laughs when dere's a joke, an' de way he keeps his mouf tight shut when dere's no 'casion to open it an' let out all he knows. Don' you like dat man, honey?"

"Oh, I like him very much," said Nancy. "He was so good to us that time we traveled, Aunt Sylvia, wasn't he?"

"He cert'nly behaved mighty p'lite," said Aunt Sylvia, "and he always takes his hat off his haid to bow to me, and he axes mos' partic'lar fo' Miss Nancy. Dis day I'm speaking ob, he was gwine back to de station, after his dinner, and he spied me out, and came up an' helped me into de sleigh, jess as fine-mannered as anybody could. An' he said to me, 'Mis' Sylvia, I don' s'pose you could be wanting to earn some extra money fo' Christmas presents, or anyt'ing o' dat kind, is you?'"

"Well, I cotched him up quick, honey, an' I said, 'Dat's jess prezackly what I is wanting. Does you know any way dat I could do it?'"

"'I do, suah, Mis' Sylvia,' he said, 'an it's an easy way, too,' he said.

"'I got a cousin—a fine, mind-her-own-business woman, dat's started a rest'rant down at de Junction,'



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he said, 'an' she axed me if I knew anybody dat could make good gingerbread, for a kind ob specialty, jess to start her trade at de fust, an' I told her I knew somebody dat made it de bes' in de country, an' she said she'd pay a good price, ebery sheet an' round cake dat pusson would make an' send to her.'

"When we said good-bye dat aft'noon, de whole 'rangement was made," said Aunt Sylvia proudly. "Mr. Lord, he mentioned de prices, an' dey was mos' satisfact'ry; we 'ranged dat 'Vanus would carry de gingerbread down when he took de letters, an' went after de mail, an' I made it mo'nings while dat Betty was tending to de up-stairs rooms, an' you an' de Admiral read books an' lessons."

"Oh, Aunt Sylvia, how clever you were!" said Nancy, and there was a thrill of gratification in the old voice as it answered her.

"I's always been a pow'ful planner when 'casions rise," said Aunt Sylvia. "Three weeks I done jess like I tol' you, an' dat rest'rانت cousin ob Mr. Lord's pay me jess like she promise. I counted out de prices ob all de cups o' m'lasses, an' pieces o' butter, an' spoonfuls o' ginger, an' everyt'ing what I used in making dose gingerbreads, and after all, how much money you s'pose I make, my lamb?"



"Oh, could you have made ten dollars, Aunt Sylvia?" asked Nancy.

"I made out o' dose gingerbreads, from de whole transactions, eighteen dollars an' twenty-eight cents," announced Aunt Sylvia; then she leaned back and closed her eyes. "My stars! 'peared like I nebber wanted to see a mite o' ginger or de handle ob dat m'lasses jug again, when dose three weeks was gone!" she breathed.

"You dear Aunt Sylvia!" said Nancy softly. "Oh, how good you were to do it! and I know just how you felt toward the molasses jug—the way I used to feel toward my sampler, when I was little; you remember?"

"I 'member," said Aunt Sylvia, "an' I reckon 'twas 'bout de same."

They rocked in silence for a few moments, while the room grew darker and the last flecks of color faded from the sky.

"Aunt Sylvia," said Nancy at last, "it's my turn now to earn some money, if I only could without troubling grandfather. Marguerite says I might sell some of my embroideries at a place she knows in the city, a 'Woman's Exchange,' she called it. But I suppose grandfather would not approve of a Beaumont



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doing that, when she's a girl," and Nancy gave a little sigh. "Wouldn't it have been better, almost, if I'd been a boy, Aunt Sylvia?"

Aunt Sylvia patted her hand rapidly, and her voice was indignant.

"Boys enough in dis worl', 'thout my lamb," she said. "I reckon dere'd a-been a great mistake made if you'd been anyt'ing but jess yo' ole Aunt Sylvy's lamb. An' de Admiral, he's real pleased to hab you de prezack way you is; but de Beaumont ladies must fold dere hands, and let de Beaumont gen'lemen earn all de money, 'cording to de Admiral's ideas. Still—'co'se, my lamb, if de Admiral didn't know 'bout it, 'twouldn't 'sturb him—and 't isn't anyt'ing wrong. You write Mis' Gen'l Compton and ax her. But don' you worry yo' little haid 'bout money, 'cause it'll come, some way."

"But you won't make any more gingerbread, Aunt Sylvia; promise me," begged Nancy; "you got so tired over it, all for me!"

"I won't make one mo' loaf nor round cake, nor nuffin', o' gingerbread," Aunt Sylvia promised. "Isn't I told you I's glad 'tis all done? De rest'rant cousin she is doing firs' rate, now, an' she's found somebody dat makes good gingerbread, 'cepting Mr. Lord did



say 'twasn't good as mine. What I got to turn my 'tention to now is 'Vanus; he got kind ob out o' my hand, when he was gwine down to de station ebery day, seeing all dat bustle an' gay doings; I mistrus' he needs looking to;" Aunt Sylvia creaked the rocker peacefully. "I mistrus' he needs looking to, an' a teeny bit mo' work," she added. "I'll go see whar he is at, dis minute."



## CHAPTER XII

### AN OLD LACE SCARF

WHEN Nancy thought over her talk with Aunt Sylvia the next day, she did not feel quite satisfied.

"I'm afraid Aunt Sylvia is so anxious to have me visit the Comptons that she'll try to earn more money for pretty clothes," she said to herself that morning as she stood in her room, looking wistfully at the old tapestry which hid the sliding panel, and wishing Marguerite were in the next room. "I am sure that must have been one of the secrets she had with Mrs. Compton; she probably told her just what I ought to have to 'go-a-visiting proper'—she's told me so many times."

"A white ebening dress, and a blue ebening dress," she chanted, as Aunt Sylvia had chanted to her many a time, rocking back and forth, with her eyes raised to the ceiling as if she hoped the dresses might drop down at her call; "a silk comp'ny dress, and a cloth dress fo' to gwine in de shops along wid Mis' Gen'l Compton an' Miss Marguerite, an' two house dresses fo' to wear in de mo'nings."

"I have the 'blue ebening dress,'" said Nancy, as



she opened her closet door, and looked at the great white bag in which Aunt Sylvia had shrouded the pretty gown; "but the others are still in the beautiful shops Aunt Sylvia tells me about. There's my only other evening dress, made from one of my mother's muslins." Nancy laid her hand lovingly on the soft, limp folds. "You're so old," she whispered, "and I've worn you so much, and you've been mended so often! Aunt Sylvia and I are almost afraid you will not last very much longer, but I can't spare you yet. There is my silk comp'ny dress, grandmother's plaid—and grandfather thinks there was never anything else so beautiful."

Nancy looked at the old plaid silk with respect, but she had no love for it. When she wore it she always felt that a great deal was expected of her.

"It's of no use to look for anything to match the cloth dress," and Nancy shook her old riding skirt till it danced on its hook. "You poor old thing, you do the best you can," she said, "but if it weren't that everybody looks at Jessie's satin coat instead of at you, I'm afraid there would be some very uncomplimentary things said about you; Mrs. Potter knows you, so you'd better hold together as well as you can when I ride in to town this afternoon to see her.



"You are my house dresses," and she pointed her finger at three little cashmere skirts, and two worn gingham, hanging in a row. "You're too short for anybody as old as I am, and oh, how you pinch me! But Aunt Sylvia has let you down, and let you out till there's nothing more to let. Now mind you don't fall to pieces while I need you.

"Nobody could go a-visiting with such clothes, of course," said Nancy, and she shut the closet door with a sharp click, as if the matter were settled once for all. "But they are all right to wear here, where every one knows me, and nobody minds what I have on; even Jack," and Nancy smiled at the thought, "even Jack didn't notice how different my dresses are from Marguerite's, he's so used to seeing me in them."

Before she started on her ride in town that afternoon, she seated herself in Aunt Sylvia's lap, and taking the sewing out of her hands, and the spectacles from her head, Nancy looked her old mammy straight in the eyes.

"Now, Aunt Sylvia, I want to ask you one more question, and please answer it," said Nancy. "You told me you shouldn't make any more gingerbread for Mr. Lord's cousin, but you didn't promise not to make other things for her. Will you do it now?"



A look of relief and satisfaction overspread the wrinkled face.

“’Co’s e I will, my lamb,” she said promptly. “I promises you I won’t make dat rest’rant cousin nuffin’ ’t all, no matter what ! Now is you contented, honey ?”

“Yes, I am,” said Nancy, “because I’d rather never go to the city than to have you get tired out for me ; here’s your work, and here are your spectacles, and I can go in town now without thinking maybe you’ll be making loaves and loaves of sponge-cake while I’m gone.”

“I shall sit right hyah in dis chair till you come back,” said Aunt Sylvia ; ’less I’s ’bleeged to go wake dat Betty up to get de tea made in time. Good-bye, honey.”

“M-m,” she said when Nancy had gone ; “I’s gwine close my eyes, too ; dey’s been open consid’able long, ’pears to me, an’ dey needs a rest, same as my pore ole back. M-m. ’Twas mighty lucky, de way she axed dat question ob hers.”

It was a delightful winter day, with crisp air, but scarcely a hint of wind, save the breeze which Nancy and Jessie felt as they flew along the road, the breeze of their own haste and joy in motion.

“Oh, Jessie, it is such a good day for us, isn’t it ?”



said Nancy, when the pretty mare had received her lump of sugar and her ears and forehead had been patted and rubbed. Nancy sprang lightly to the saddle, and off they flew again, past tall evergreens, and leafless birches, and little sparkling roadside things, along the ridge, down the hill, through the valley, and into Potterville, trotting up to Mrs. Potter's gate in fine style.

"Well there, I said to Mr. Potter this noon when we were eating dinner, that nothing would surprise me less than to see you this afternoon," called Mrs. Potter from the doorway. "I've got a little cold, and I believe I won't come out. Hadn't you better put Jessie in the barn; the air's real searching, to my mind, though good and seasonable."

Nancy followed her suggestion, and when Jessie had been comfortably established in the barn, she went into the house, where a warm welcome was given her, and in a few moments she was seated in one window of Mrs. Potter's living-room, while that brisk, kind-hearted woman was ensconced in the other window, which, it must be admitted, commanded a much more extended view. However, Nancy had not come to look out of the window, but to have a good visit and chat with her hostess, so she was not in the least troubled.



She told all the doings of the last few days at Beaumont Corners which she was willing to have spread through the town, and some other things which, as Mrs. Potter remarked, were "just between their two selves." Nancy had learned that much as Mrs. Potter liked to hear and tell news, she would keep anything entrusted to her confidence most loyally.

When Nancy's recital was finished and Mrs. Potter had emptied her budget of news, there was a short silence. Mrs. Potter looked thoughtfully at her guest, opened her mouth as if to speak—shut it tight, and then opened it again.

"Please, what is it, Mrs. Potter?" asked Nancy. "You look very mysterious."

"I've had nine minds about telling you," said Mrs. Potter; "but now I'm going to—and I don't believe you'll object to hearing it, however you decide. You know the wife of the mill superintendent by sight, the one he's married lately, that has such a lot of money, and fashionable relatives? You've seen her? Well, day before yesterday, she dropped in here, real friendly. I was surprised!"

"Why shouldn't she come?" asked Nancy innocently.

"Some wouldn't," was Mrs. Potter's evasive reply,



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"but she did. And I showed all I had to show, and among other things that lace shawl that descended from my great aunt—the one you mended for me."

"Oh," said Nancy, "didn't she think it was a beautiful shawl? Money couldn't buy a shawl like that, Aunt Sylvia thinks."

"I presume she's right," said Mrs. Potter, smoothing her skirt, "but what took Mrs. Carter's eye the most was your mending."

"'Who did that beautiful piece of work for you, Mrs. Potter?' she asked me. She speaks right up about things, like a person who's always been used to having others at her beck and call, but she has the kind of a way with her that keeps you from taking offense as you would with some folks. Puts her head on one side, and looks at you something like a bird, and you just tell her whatever she wants to know."

"'Little Miss Nancy Beaumont, Admiral Beaumont's granddaughter, did it for me,' I told her. I spoke with considerable dignity, too. 'She's a friend of mine,' I told Mrs. Carter, 'though I'm more than old enough to be her mother, and our bringing up has been different. Miss Nancy has been raised according to the traditions of her grandfather's female ancestors and wife, of what a lady should be,' I told her, 'and I was brought



up to earn a penny and turn it into two, wherever I could.' ”

“But that is just what I should like to do,” Nancy said quickly, as she looked at Mrs. Potter’s uplifted chin and lofty expression.

“I spoke impressive, just as I’ve repeated it,” said Mrs. Potter, allowing her chin to resume its usual position, “but she only laughed and said, ‘Oh, if I could only get hold of that child, I’d persuade her to do some mending for me, on a wonderful old scarf I have. I’d pay twenty-five dollars in a minute,’ she said, ‘to have it mended like that shawl of yours. I’ve never been able to find any one to do it. Is her grandfather rich?’ ”

“I told her Admiral Beaumont had never taken me into his confidence, and I gave her no satisfaction,” said Mrs. Potter, “but I’ve been thinking, since then. Nancy, here’s her sleigh this minute! Suppose she should be coming here! She is—well—maybe she won’t come in.”

Nancy sat with hot cheeks in the window while Mrs. Potter bustled to the door.

“I’m coming in to see you a little while, Mrs. Potter,” said a clear, ringing voice, and over the threshold came a swish of silk skirts under a beautiful fur coat.



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Mrs. Potter escorted her guest to the living-room where Nancy stood, looking like the little lady she was, waiting to be introduced; but there was no time for introductions.

"You must be Nancy Beaumont, I'm sure," said Mrs. Carter, and she swept across the room, holding out her hand to the little girl, her brilliant face under the great black hat with its long plumes looking like some wonderful flower to Nancy's eager imagination.

"Yes, I am Nancy Beaumont," she said breathlessly, "but how did you know?"

The lady threw an amused glance over her shoulder at Mrs. Potter. "Oh, I—why I've seen all the town children," she said, "and you look rather different, so I guessed you must be the little girl who lives out at Beaumont Corners."

"It is my dress," thought Nancy; "all the Potterville little girls have tight sleeves this year, Aunt Sylvia says, because it's the fashion; but I can't help that."

"I suppose I do look quite different," she said aloud, "because Aunt Sylvia and I did not understand about the new sleeves. Some time I shall have tight ones, unless they go out of fashion too soon."

Mrs. Carter put her head on one side, in the bird-like way Mrs. Potter had mentioned.



"It wasn't entirely the sleeves," she said, and then she laughed, so gayly that Nancy laughed with her, though she did not quite know the reason.

"Mrs. Potter has frightened me, telling me how you've been brought up," she said, when they were all seated, and Mrs. Potter had passed a dish of candied orange-peel with the remark that it was "dry stuff, but some folks liked it." "You can't think how envious I am of that shawl of Mrs. Potter's! and there's my wonderful old scarf, just crying to be mended! I have it here, under my cloak; I brought it to see if I couldn't soften Mrs. Potter's heart enough so that she would ask you to look at it. See!"

From a rose-colored silk, she unwrapped the filmy scarf; a tracery of ivy leaves was over it all, and it was perfect save for one place in the plain mesh of the lace; there a great rent had been torn, by a nail, Mrs. Carter sorrowfully explained.

"And you see I can't wear it," she said, "for it is in just the place where it cannot be hidden. Isn't it sad?"

She looked up at Nancy, her bright eyes dancing under the broad hat brim. Then she held the scarf toward the little girl with both hands.

"Take it," she said under her breath; "won't you, please, and make it whole? I couldn't find any one to



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do it in the city. And how can there be a child, no matter how her ancestors were brought up, who wouldn't like twenty-five dollars to spend for anything she wanted? Let me go out to Beaumont Corners, and ask your grandfather! I have a grandfather of my own."

Then she buried her face in her hands, laughing.

"I can twist him around my little finger, the old dear!" she said, lifting her rosy face to Mrs. Potter's gaze and nodding saucily at her. "Perhaps he's not just like Admiral Beaumont."

"I don't think any one—even grandmother—ever twisted grandfather around her little finger," laughed Nancy.

She held the scarf, and looked at it carefully; then she folded it.

"May I have the silk to put it in?" she asked. "And I will mend it, Mrs. Carter, and when it is done, I will tell grandfather about it, and ask him if I may have the money. He will be glad to have me do it for you, for friendship," said Nancy in her quaint little way, "but—but I should be very glad to have the money if he thinks I may—if it is worth what you say."

"Indeed it is, you dear little thing," said Mrs.



Carter. "And now I'm off. You shall have your visit here, and I'll come some other day. No," to Mrs. Potter's protest in which Nancy joined; "no, I have other errands. And you'll come to see me some time, won't you?" she asked the little girl as she shook hands. "And then I'll return the call on you—and the Admiral."

She bobbed her head with a mischievous smile at Nancy, and swept out of the room, accompanied by her hostess, still protesting.

"Think of that darling's imagining it was her sleeves that made her different from the other children," whispered Mrs. Carter, her lips close to Mrs. Potter's ear, her fingers pinching that good woman's arm, as she reached the outer door. "I can scarcely wait to get home to tell my husband that! Good-bye. I'll come again soon."

"Well, there," said Mrs. Potter, as she seated herself again in the best window. "Wasn't that surprising? Where were we, Nancy, in conversation, when she came? I'm so mixed up, I don't know but we'll have to begin our visit all over again. There's one thing I want to ask you—sounds ridiculous, but still—Nancy, did you ride along here between five and half-past this morning, and back again a few minutes after? Of



course I know you didn't, in the pitch dark—unless the Admiral needed the doctor.”

Nancy shook her head most decidedly.

“I was sound asleep in my bed,” she said. “Did you think you heard somebody?”

“I did hear them,” asserted Mrs. Potter. “I heard a horse's hoofs, and they sounded exactly like your Jessie's.”

“There must be some one else who rides, then,” said Nancy. “I wonder who it can be—and so early in the morning.”

“I wonder, too,” said Mrs. Potter, and turned the talk to other things. “For you can't deceive my ears,” she told her husband that night. “It was Jessie's hoofs I heard—and if Nancy wasn't on her back, all I can say is, somebody else was—and for my part I believe it was that Sylvanus, stealing off somewhere while the rest of the family were sound asleep. I hope he won't run off and leave them some day. He's too high-flown for his work, I've always said. Such words as he uses, too!”

“He's devoted to the family, I think,” said Mr. Potter mildly, but his wife had small regard for his opinions on such matters.

“I shall watch out,” she said firmly, “and if I see



occasion I shall step out some morning and inquire what's being done under cover of the dark. You eat your supper, and leave the matter to me ; I'll attend to it," and Mrs. Potter wore the look of one fully capable of battling with any and all difficulties and putting them to rout once for all.



## CHAPTER XIII

### EARLY MORNING ECHOES

ON her way home—racing with the wind which had come up from behind the hills, and tossed Nancy's curls, and Jessie's mane, but could never quite get past the little rider on her fleet-footed mare—Nancy thought of all she had heard and seen during the afternoon.

The scarf in its silken covering was in the bag which Nancy wore by a strap over her shoulder, and which pounded against her side as she rode.

“You didn't see the beautiful lady, Jessie,” she said to the mare, as they sped along, “but some day you will. I wonder if she rides. Why, she might be the person whose horse's hoofs Mrs. Potter heard! She looks as if she would not mind riding in the dark any more than the daylight; she'd think it was fun. She must be brave, like the Beaumonts, Jessie—not a bit like me.”

Jessie gave a soft whinny, as if she wished to let her little mistress know that whether brave or not, she was perfectly satisfactory from Jessie's point of view.



While the Admiral and Nancy took their tea together, she told him of her visit, and spoke of Mrs. Carter.

"She is beautiful, grandfather," said Nancy; "not sweet and gentle like Mrs. Compton, but splendid, like a great golden rose. And she wore a big black hat with long drooping plumes—like the one your great-grandmother has on, in the portrait."

"It was said that my great-grandmother was tall, with a swan-like neck and a remarkably graceful carriage," said the Admiral. "She must have been a great beauty, from her portraits. I believe half the young men in the county proposed for her hand. This young woman, Nancy—is she a lady, in your opinion?"

"Oh, yes, grandfather," said Nancy. "I know you would say she is a lady, but she is"—the little girl spread her arms wide—"she is—oh, I can't describe her, grandfather, but she makes you feel as if the place you were in had grown smaller, all at once, and as if—as if when she wished you to do anything, you'd have to—because you'd want to please her."

"An interesting person, I should say," the Admiral remarked, as he stirred his cup of tea. "Her people are of good stock. I learned through Bartley Pearson's rambling talk on Christmas that her grandfather



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is a man I once knew fairly well—in my long-vanished youth.”

“Don’t say that, grandfather,” and Nancy held up a warning finger; “you know you promised me you wouldn’t. Perhaps if I go to call on Mrs. Carter, and she comes to see us, you would talk to her about those days—not long-vanished, to please her—and me.”

“Very well, my dear,” said the Admiral with a chuckle, “we’ll think of them as only day before yesterday if you say so. Go to call as soon as you like, and invite Mrs. Carter out here for a cup of tea with us some afternoon. I’m told her husband stays pretty closely at home when his work is done. Business is allowed to prevent the carrying on of social duties in these days,” and he looked quite severely at Nancy, as if she were partly responsible for the state of affairs.

“I think I will go some afternoon soon,” Nancy said to herself that night, as she unfolded the scarf, and looked at it by the light of her candle. Even in the dim room its beauty showed. “I will work on it every morning when grandfather has finished with my studies, while Aunt Sylvia is looking after Betty. I think I won’t tell any one—even Aunt Sylvia—about it, for a few days.”

Something—some unusual sound outdoors, she





SHE EXAMINED THE SCARF







thought—waked her the next morning long before daylight. She listened intently, but there was no repetition of the sound, whatever it might have been, and she soon fell asleep again. By daylight she examined the scarf again, and selected from her basket of fine threads one which looked fit for a spider's web.

“That will do,” she said, as she tried it against the mesh of the scarf; and when her free time came she sat in the low chair by her window, her curls falling against her soft cheeks as she bent over the work, making the fine stitches which were partly the result of training and partly a gift of her inheritance from a long line of ancestors whose skill with the needle was their greatest pride.

“When it is done,” Nancy whispered, as she held it off when her morning's freedom was over, “no one will ever know where it was torn. She will put her head on one side and smile at me when she sees it. I know she will.”

It was two days later that Nancy waked again in the early morning, with the feeling that something unusual was going on out-of-doors; but although she sprang to the window, and clasping her face in her palms, peered out into the darkness, she could see nothing.



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"But I do hear a sound of hoofs," she thought, "as if they were just down at the end of the bridle-path. I wish I could see."

"Aunt Sylvia," she said when her old mammy came into the room to say good-morning and see if Nancy were in the pink of tidiness demanded by the Admiral, "Aunt Sylvia, have you been waked up early by the sound of hoofs any of these mornings?"

Aunt Sylvia shook her head violently.

"Waked up by de sound o' hoofs, honey," she repeated, her forehead wrinkled with surprise, as if she had never heard of such an amazing idea before. "You mean to say you t'ink yo' ole mammy stays in her bed till 'Vanus takes de hosses out de barn to gib 'em dere frisky turn roun' de yard? I's always down in de kitchen long befo' dat," said Aunt Sylvia reproachfully.

"Oh, no, I didn't mean that," said Nancy hastily. "I mean before it is light, Aunt Sylvia, and the sound comes from the road, down where the bridle-path turns in, where there's that queer little echo against the big ledge across the road. You remember?"

"I 'members dat place, ob co'se," said Aunt Sylvia; "all dese long yeahs, I's known dat place. When did de sound come, my lamb?"

"The first time I've really heard it, to know what it



was," said Nancy, "was this morning; but day before yesterday something waked me up—some sound—and I couldn't tell what it was."

"Dat echo from down whar de bridle-path turns into de road wouldn't hab waked you out ob a sound sleep," said Aunt Sylvia. "Must hab been you's dreamin' some noises, an' dey was so real dey waked you up."

Nancy was not convinced.

"I wonder if whoever was riding could have been up near the house," she said thoughtfully. "Mrs. Potter told me, the other day, that some one on horse-back had been past their house early in the morning, before daylight. She asked if I'd been in town for the doctor, though she didn't really think I had. She thought the hoofs sounded like Jessie's. I wonder who the other rider is, and why he takes such a queer time to ride."

Aunt Sylvia was never fond of Mrs. Potter, and now her tone was full of exasperation.

"I wish dat woman would 'tend to her pore husband—bresh his co'ts an' trousies mo' thorough, an' keep him mended up at de seams," she said. "I nebber see a lady befo' dat had so much time to be lookin' out ob windys, an' openin' do's so nobody can get pas', an' runnin' roun' de neighborhood like dat



Mis' Potter does. If dar is somebody dat's got a hoss-back hoss, an' wants to ride him 'thout her advices an' remarks, he prob'ly has to get up in de dark to do it. Fo' my part," said Aunt Sylvia, "my symp'thies goes out to dat rider, whoeber he is. An' if he do come out pas' Beaumont Co'ners, 'tis prob'ly because he knows it is a place whar de folkses isn't up in de middle ob de night peekin' an' pryin' fo' fear somebody mought get by an' dey not see him."

"Why, Aunt Sylvia," laughed Nancy, "don't you think you are a little bit cross about poor Mrs. Potter? If something wakes us up, we can't help it, can we?"

"Some folks is mighty ready to be waked up," grumbled Aunt Sylvia. "Don' you get in dose habits, my lamb."

"I promise not to," and Nancy's rosy face was as solemn as she could make it, so solemn that Aunt Sylvia's displeasure gave way, and she laughed outright.

"You look tired," said Nancy in her most coaxing tone; "won't you rest a little while this morning, Aunt Sylvia, and let Betty attend to all the work upstairs? She can do it perfectly well."

Aunt Sylvia straightened her old shoulders, and held her head very stiffly as she turned to leave the room.



“’Long as I’s spared to hab my healths, I shall look after dat Betty’s co’ners an’ woodworks,” she announced, “an’ plump up de pillows, which she cyant do, in de ways dey should be plumped. Breakfas’ is mos’ ready, my lamb, an’ de Admiral’s stick is making a pow’ful loud soun’ in de hall.”

“What’s the reason your son gets me up half an hour before my regular time?” the Admiral demanded as Aunt Sylvia was trying to slip unnoticed through the hall. “He always used to be late.”

“’Pears like dat boy’s met up wid a change,” said Aunt Sylvia in her mildest tone. “He would’ve waked you more’n half an hour earlier dan he did, Admiral, if I hadn’t cotched him jess in time. Seems ’s if he was beginning to act somet’ing like his pore father did—kind o’ res’less; I don’ know but I’ll fetch him in to see de doctor one ob dese days, and hab him looked ober. You jess bear wid him all you kin, Admiral, an’ I’ll keep at him all I kin, an’ he’ll come out all de better fo’ dis troublous time.”

“What in the world are you running on about?” asked the Admiral irritably; but Aunt Sylvia had prudently vanished, leaving Nancy to answer the question as best she might.

“That lazy boy of hers is up to some tricks, I’m



afraid," said the Admiral. "He comes into my room much earlier than he used, and whereas he's always been rather deft about moving things, now he falls over the furniture, and seems half asleep; and he's apparently lost all idea of time; told me this morning his watch had run down because he only wound it once, yesterday, and he felt sure it must be a great deal later than the clock said. I don't know what to make of him. He's never been brilliant, but at least he's had a few grains of common sense, until lately. My first fear was that he might have been drinking, but he hadn't."

"Oh, no," said Nancy, "he'd never do that; he's a good boy, I'm sure, grandfather."

"Well, well, let it go for this time," said the Admiral. "It's a small matter, after all."

"It isn't a small matter," said Nancy, as she put her hand through her grandfather's arm to walk into the dining-room. "I'll attend to it—you shan't be waked up just when you're having your beauty nap, Admiral Beaumont. I will see that it does not occur again."

"Will you, indeed?" chuckled her grandfather; "then I shall be perfectly safe. I place my case in your hands, my dear, for immediate settlement."



"I accept it," and Nancy waved her hand to the portrait of a lawyer ancestor under which they were passing at the moment, and they entered the dining-room in the best of spirits.



## CHAPTER XIV

### NANCY MAKES A CALL

THE puzzle came back to Nancy's mind a few afternoons later as she rode Jessie down the hill on her way to Potterville, and came suddenly upon Johnny Kane, the freckle-faced boy, whistling as he trudged up the road.

"How do you do?" said Nancy, stopping the mare. "Were you going up to our house on any errand? I can turn back, and save you the trouble if you like. I thought you might be taking some special thing for Mr. Pearson," she added, as Johnny seemed overcome with confusion at her words.

"N-no," he stammered, "I thought I'd go up and see Sylvanus a little while—in the barn," he explained as Nancy looked at him in frank wonderment. "He's—he's teaching me how to take care of horses."

"When does he teach you, Johnny?" asked Nancy gravely. She had never seen the boy at Beaumont Corners save by special invitation. "Do you mean he talks to you about things while he's waiting at the post-office?"



She smiled at Johnny, who smiled gratefully back at her for helping him out of a corner, although she did not know her question had put him in one.

"Yes," he said, "he talks to me whenever I'm 'round; and I love horses. I'd like to grow up fast and help Mr. Hobbs in the livery stable, same as—same as the one that helps him now."

"I'm glad he's found some one to help him," said Nancy in her friendly way; "the last time I saw him he said his man had gone off, and he didn't know which way to turn."

"Yes," said Johnny Kane. "Well, good-bye, I guess I'll be going along," and with what was intended for a fine bow, the boy turned and started up the hill.

"Sylvanus told me she'd be gone before this time," he thought as he trudged on; "I reckon I won't tell him I met her, 'less he asks me."

"I wonder what grandfather would say to that," Nancy mused, as the mare trotted swiftly along. "He never goes out to the barn, so he won't know, and poor Sylvanus has such small wages I think grandfather could not claim all his time. I suppose Sylvanus leaves the sleigh at Mr. Hobbs' to keep Ezra warm, while he does the errands and gets the mail, and he loves so to feel important; probably he has half a dozen



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pupils among the boys. I can't help it," said Nancy philosophically, and she turned her thoughts to other things.

An urgent letter had come from Marguerite the night before, begging Nancy to plan for the visit "without fail." She had written that on inquiry she had found the "Woman's Exchange," of which she had told Nancy, could not take her embroideries, because Nancy lived in another state.

"You haven't said you'd send any," wrote Marguerite, "so I didn't tell them your name, but I said you were a most particular friend of mine, and that you lived only twenty-five miles over the state line. They were very polite and interested, but they shook their heads, all the same. I told mother I didn't like to have her a director in such a narrow institution, but mother only laughed. She didn't believe your grandfather would let you do it, anyway. But, Nancy, he would let you have a present from us, wouldn't he? just because we love you. I want the visit so much, I shall cry my eyes out if you can't come!"

Nancy had put the letter inside her waist when she dressed for her call on Mrs. Carter. It lay warm, over her heart. It was so good to be longed for as a visitor, even if she could not be one. For Nancy knew her



grandfather's pride—a pride which seemed a little cold and hard to Nancy, as it had seemed to her gentle Frost mother years before.

“If we were rich, he'd let me take the present—because I didn't need it,” she explained to Jessie, as they reached the foot of the hill, “but if you are a Beaumont, Jessie, and really want anything that you can't afford, you must hold your head very high—so—and try to look as if you didn't care one straw for it. And, oh, it's hard, when you're part Frost!”

Jessie moved her ears back and forth in a drooping way, as if she fully appreciated Nancy's feelings, and the little girl patted her silky mane.

“You do comfort me, Jessie,” she said softly; “for you act as if you understood, and I believe you do. Now we have to turn up this other road where you and I have not been since last summer, for we are to call on Mrs. Carter, Jessie. I have a card that grandfather wrote for me, in grandmother's card-case, and I feel very grown up.”

The Carter house was set a little back from the road, but there were few trees about it, so it was plainly to be seen. Jessie trotted up the driveway at a gait which Nancy considered proper for an approaching caller. Aunt Sylvia had proposed her going in state



in the carriage, with Sylvanus to drive her, but Nancy had objected, and her grandfather had borne her out.

"The child is right, I think," he said to Aunt Sylvia, when the question was discussed. "It might give offense to our good friends in Potterville on whom she has never called with the carriage. And the Beaumont ladies have always exchanged friendly visits with their neighbors, going from one country place to another, on their favorite saddle horses. She may go on Jessie, if she likes."

At the piazza steps Nancy dismounted; taking a worn old card-case embroidered in faded blues and greens from her bag, she hung the bag on the saddle, and whispered to Jessie.

"If she's not at home I shan't go in, Jessie," she said, "and if she is, I'll ask where you may go, dear, so you'll not catch cold; grandfather says grandmother's calls were twenty minutes long, so if I'm not where I can see a clock, I shall be so afraid of staying too long, I shall probably be back with you very soon."

She shook out the folds of her old riding-skirt, mounted the steps, and pressed the electric bell. Almost instantly a tall man in a black suit, with a face



like that of a wooden soldier, and eyes which looked over Nancy's head, opened the door.

"Is Mrs. Carter at home?" asked Nancy.

"She his, miss," replied the man, his lips opening and closing automatically.

"Will you give her my card?" said Nancy, stepping over the threshold, and then on his tray of carved wood the Carters' butler received a calling-card such as his eyes had never before beheld.

Admiral Beaumont had made it as much like one of his wife's calling-cards as he possibly could. His fingers had lost some of their old-time cunning, but he was able to draw with his pen on the oblong card—glazed and yellowed by time and seclusion in his desk—a bird with a remarkably long and feathery tail, and a liberal beak from which floated a pennant; on this pennant, in the Admiral's best and finest penmanship, was inscribed "Miss Nancy Beaumont," the flourishes being so many and so involved that the name was almost unrecognizable.

"Kindly take a seat there, miss," said the butler, waving his hand toward the room which led from the hall at the right, and Nancy walked in, and seating herself in a small chair with a straight back, folded her hands in her lap. She could hear the murmur of



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voices up-stairs ; then it stopped, when the butler's tread had reached the next floor ; there was an exclamation in a voice Nancy remembered, though she had heard it only once, and then swiftly down the stairs came Mrs. Carter, and into the room, both hands extended, looking more bird-like and flower-like than ever, her beautiful dark head rising from a rose-colored gown of some material so soft and glossy that Nancy longed to smooth it.

"You dear little thing!" cried Mrs. Carter. "We won't visit in this stiff old room. We'll go up-stairs to my own sunny place, and you'll take off your hat and look as if you had really come to spend the afternoon. I'll ring for the man to take your mare out to the stable. What a beauty she is—and how her coat shines. Our new man is learning how to get that gloss from Mr. Hobbs—the livery stable man. He didn't know much when he came to us, but he's faithful and willing, my husband thinks."

She had her arm around Nancy and was drawing her to the door, but the little girl resisted her, gently but firmly.

"I mustn't go up this first time, Mrs. Carter," she said, "for grandfather said I must not stay more than about twenty minutes, and he would not like it if I forgot ;



and I should be sure to forget if I went up-stairs with you," she added shyly, her cheeks very pink under the gaze of her new friend. "But if Jessie may go to the stable I should be glad, for she might take cold."

"She makes me think of a mare I left at home," said Mrs. Carter. "I might send for her in the spring, and you and I could ride together, couldn't we? It seems strange, but Mr. Carter says there is no one else who rides, so far as he knows, though there are so many beautiful roads. Mrs. Potter says you're the only equestrienne," she added with a mischievous look at Nancy, "and I have not heard of any equestrian, either, in the two months I've been here. I think Mrs. Potter would have mentioned his name, if there were one. I saw her again yesterday."

"I don't see why Mrs. Potter didn't tell her what she told me," Nancy wondered for a moment, but as Mrs. Carter talked gayly on, she forgot everything else in her delight in looking at her hostess, and listening to the ripple of her words. She forgot to look at the clock until almost half an hour had passed, but when she remembered, she gave a little cry of dismay at which Mrs. Carter laughed merrily.

"It is because you have made me so much at home,"



said Nancy in her old-fashioned way, as she rose to go, and stood, a quaint but wholly charming little figure, both hands clasped in those of her new friend. "Will you come a week from to-day to drink a cup of tea with grandfather and me, please? We should be proud and delighted to have you."

"And I shall be proud and delighted to go," said Mrs. Carter, who had received from Nancy a second card bearing the Admiral's name, which the little girl delivered with an appropriate message from her grandfather. "And, Nancy, if one of my uncles, who is quite a famous physician, happened to be here at the time, might I take him with me? I think Admiral Beaumont would enjoy talking with him."

"Any friend of yours will be more than welcome," said Nancy, in the formula she had learned in her baby days. "I love to have people come," she added with the enthusiasm which no amount of formal Beaumont training had quenched. "Please bring him, surely."

"Jessie," said the little girl, leaning over till her head came as close as might be to the mare's ears, when they were out on the homeward road once more; "Jessie dear—she is a real lady, and I know grandfather would say so, if I could explain to him how I know so well—but I can't tell any one except you. I was there thirty-



five—minutes—Jessie, and she never mentioned that lace scarf! She didn't even do what Mrs. Potter calls 'making an opening' for me to speak of it, Jessie! Now let's fly home, dear, as fast as we can!"



## CHAPTER XV

### SYLVANUS IS MISSING

THE next week would have been a delightful one for Nancy, if it had not been for her grandfather's rheumatism. It was not only the gout in his poor foot, or the stiffness of the leg wounded so long ago ; there was scarcely a part of the Admiral's gaunt frame which did not cause him moments of excruciating pain.

He bore it without flinching, but his disposition suffered, and Nancy, of whom he was devotedly fond in his undemonstrative fashion, found it almost impossible to please her grandfather.

But the mending was progressing to her perfect satisfaction, and while the mesh grew under her little fingers her thoughts were busy with many pleasant possibilities.

"If only grandfather's rheumatism would be better before I have to ask him if I may take the money," she said to herself many times. "When he feels well, he is not nearly as Beaumonty as when he's ill. Is he, Julia Frost?"



Julia Frost who, after one unfortunate encounter with the Admiral's gouty foot, had been denied the privileges of the library and hall, sat at a respectful distance, eyeing Nancy's work with some disfavor. She had once essayed to jump into it, and had been rebuffed gently but surely. As to her opinion of the Admiral, she expressed it by an elaborate yawn.

"I feel like yawning, too, Julia," said Nancy. "I'll put away this scarf and play with you for a while. To-morrow is the day of our tea-drinking, Julia—and such frosted cakes as Aunt Sylvia has made! And I think there's to be some butt'nut s'prise, too, for an extra, you know."

Julia Frost yawned again, but after the yawn she began to purr, and settled herself comfortably on Nancy's shoulder.

"It has been hard work to keep Sylvanus from going into grandfather's room too early," said Nancy, rubbing her cheek back and forth on Julia's fur. "Day before yesterday I was barely in time; I don't see what is the matter with Sylvanus; he's up so early, and yet he seems half asleep; and Aunt Sylvia is not up as soon as she used to be, I'm sure, or she would look after him. Poor dear Aunt Sylvia is growing old, I'm afraid."



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Nancy was half frightened at this thought, for Aunt Sylvia had been her refuge and her comforter so many times, and now she began to feel that Aunt Sylvia must not be told things which might trouble her.

"Jack told me to write to him if anything bothered me," said Nancy to her cat, "but I couldn't bear to write him little troubling things when he's away in college working so hard with his studies and tutoring, and making us prouder and prouder of him all the time. And of course I mustn't write any worries to Marguerite or her mother. There doesn't seem to be any one just right for me to tell, now—and I don't feel so very grown-up, Julia Frost—not half as grown-up as I ought to feel, I suppose."

The cat stretched out one gray paw toward the rose-colored silk, in which the scarf lay on top of Nancy's bureau.

"I know what you're thinking, Julia Frost," said Nancy, "you are thinking that Mrs. Carter would be a person any one would love to tell things ; and she is sensible, for all she looks like the flowers and the birds," she added, cuddling the little gray paw in her hand ; "you're exactly right, Julia Frost. But I do not know her very well yet, you see."

Julia Frost shut her eyes, and purred louder than



ever. She had the air of one who, having offered a valuable suggestion, had no further concern about it.

The next morning, long before the first ray of daylight had come to her room, Nancy waked, to hear a sound which to her quick ears was unmistakable.

"It's the barn door," she said, her heart beating fast, as she sat up in bed. "Oh, do you suppose any of the thieves I've been reading about in the paper to grandfather could be trying to steal one of the horses—Jessie!"

She could not think fast enough, it seemed to her. There was no time to stop for anything. She ran to the window, catching her little wadded wrapper from the foot of the bed and, flinging the window open, she leaned far out, so that she could see the bridle-path. If it were a thief, he must take that way, with the horse. As she leaned out she caught the gleam of a lantern, and by its flickering light she saw the face of the man who held it in one hand while with the other he led Jessie, who stepped softly along as if she felt the need of caution. It was Sylvanus!

Nancy shivered a little as she saw him start down the bridle-path, carrying the lantern and leading her mare, but she did not call after him.

"He'll put the lantern down in the bushes by the



ledge," she whispered, "and then he'll ride Jessie into town. Oh, I wonder where he goes. I wonder if poor Aunt Sylvia suspects, and that is worrying her."

It was with a heavy little heart that Nancy shut the window and crept back into bed. She tried to straighten out her thoughts, but they were in too much of a whirl. If Aunt Sylvia knew, what could be the errand that took Sylvanus into town so early, day after day?—for Nancy at once decided he must be the rider whose horse's hoofs she and Mrs. Potter had heard. And if Aunt Sylvia did not know—that would be stranger still.

"That's the reason Sylvanus has been so sleepy and so queer about waking grandfather," thought Nancy. "Oh, dear, I wish Jack were at home, so he could tell me what to do—or do it himself."

She did not fall asleep again; she lay there broad awake, thinking and thinking; at last she began to listen for the sound of returning hoofs, for the daylight was slowly stealing into her room; but no sound of hoofs came, while the light grew and the shadows began to recede to the corners of the room.

"It's time to take the horses out for their frisk, I'm sure," thought Nancy. "I hope nothing has happened to him."



At that moment her door opened and Aunt Sylvia came in, breathless.

"Put yo' wrapper on, honey," she said in a stifled voice, "an' come to de Admiral quick as you kin. He's jess r'arin' mad 'kase dat 'Vanus ain' to be found, an' he wants his laig rubbed, an' he done tole me fotch you quick as I knew how."

"Grandfather, dear, can I do anything to help?" asked Nancy as she ran into the Admiral's room and up to the bed where he was sitting, propped up by many pillows, his face red with indignation.

"Do!" echoed the Admiral; "yes, Nancy, there is something you can do. Tell me where that lazy, good-for-nothing son of Aunt Sylvia's is! The one time I've wanted him, for weeks, and he's not to be found! Where is he, woman?" he demanded, glaring at poor Aunt Sylvia.

His forehead was damp with perspiration and his brows drawn together with pain. The old darkey looked at him pityingly.

"I's done tell you, Adm'ral; I's sent him on an arrant fo' de house, an' he'll be back terreckly," she said mildly.

"Errand for the house at this time of day," roared the Admiral. "Nonsense! he isn't out of his bed."



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"Oh, yes, he is, grandfather," said Nancy. "I saw him start on his errand;" she looked across at Aunt Sylvia, whose hands were lifted, and then fell to her sides. "And hark! Yes, I'm sure I hear him coming now. You go and hurry him, please, Aunt Sylvia, and I'll stay with grandfather."

She laid her little cool hand on the Admiral's forehead, and he looked up at her, his face still drawn with pain.

"There, it isn't quite so bad," he murmured. "You go off, child; I'm in no fit temper for young lady visitors. I can't hold my old tongue."

Nancy moved her smooth, cool fingers slowly back and forth over the drawn forehead.

"Poor grandfather," she said softly. "I'm so sorry about the horrid pain."

She was still smoothing his forehead when Sylvanus, limping a little, came into the room, full of apologies, and wide awake.

"I hope you'll pardon my unappearance earlier, Admiral," he said humbly, "but the occasions and circumstances that delayed me ——"

"Don't go on with that rigmarole of yours," commanded the Admiral; "get to work with your rubbing, boy."



Nancy stole out of the room, and back to her own. She began to dress, slowly, thinking with each moment that Aunt Sylvia would appear, and explain the mystery of her son's early ride. But when Aunt Sylvia came, she was full of talk about Julia Frost and the kittens ; she gave Nancy no time to ask a question.

"'Pears like dere nebber was two smarter kittens dan Spick 'n' Span," she said, as she gave a last brushing to Nancy's curls, already shining from her ministrations. "I'll tell you some more 'bout what dey's done when I has more time, honey ; dis'll be a mighty busy day fo' me, an' I's got to keep my mind cl'ar for de aft'noon," she added as she stepped quickly out of the room, and closed the door behind her.

"But she didn't look troubled," said Nancy, comforting herself, "so perhaps it is all right about Sylvanus—only—Aunt Sylvia knows I don't like any one but myself to ride Jessie. I suppose it was because she's the swiftest and the surest-footed that he took her. But Aunt Sylvia will explain to me to-morrow, of course. If she doesn't," said Nancy decidedly, "I shall ask her, no matter how fast she talks about Spick and Span. And in the meantime I shall run down to the barn and see if Jessie is all right, while Sylvanus is with grandfather, and I shall let Sylvanus know that I



am not very much pleased with him," said Nancy, her little chin held high, as she opened her door, and walked down the stairs, and out of the house toward the barn.



## CHAPTER XVI

### "AUNT SYLVIA'S SHOP"

IN spite of its unfortunate beginning the day of the tea-drinking was not a disagreeable one. Nancy's trip to the barn failed to reveal that any harm, even of the slightest nature, had been endured by Jessie.

Nancy had a long, affectionate talk with the mare, and ran back to the house just in time for breakfast. She passed Sylvanus in the path, and the sight of his humble face softened Nancy's heart toward him. She nodded to him, but did not say anything.

"I think Sylvanus ought to apologize to me," she told herself, and again her delicate chin was raised in a fashion which would have delighted the Admiral. "He shouldn't have taken Jessie without asking me."

The Admiral was sitting in the sun, in the dining-room window, and he rose at her entrance, looking more cheerful than he had looked for days.

"I think that may have been a 'final kick,' as they say, my dear, of my rheumatism, at any rate for a while," said the Admiral. "Since the rubbing Sylvanus gave me I feel better, and have less pain than I've had



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for two weeks. It may be partly the clear, dry air, and the change in the wind. It is a beautiful day for your friends to come to Beaumont Corners. What did Mrs. Carter write you her uncle's name is, Nancy?"

"Dr. William Halliday," said the little girl, "and, grandfather, we read something about him in the paper one day, I'm sure. It was about some wonderful operation he had performed for a lame man."

"I believe we did read something of the sort," said the Admiral. "I wish he could take the stiffness out of my joints, and twenty years from my shoulders, my dear; that is the kind of operation I sadly need. But let us talk of something more possible."

Nancy saw that all his irritation at Sylvanus had vanished when his temporary release from suffering came, and she carefully avoided any subject which might recall it to his mind. They had a cheerful breakfast and an interesting hour of study on wheat-fields—something in the paper having brought them to the Admiral's notice.

When they had learned all the encyclopædia and their books of reference could teach them about wheat, the Admiral told Nancy to "run and play a while." This was a time-honored request, but the Admiral had never inquired how it was fulfilled.



Nancy went to her room, and took the scarf from its hiding-place; there was such a little bit more to be done, and it seemed as if the way were clear for her to finish her beautiful work. With patience and skill her fingers wove in and out, under and over, with the gossamer thread, until the last stitch had been taken. For one ecstatic moment she held it off and gazed at it; then she wrapped it once more in the rose-colored silk, and catching up Julia Frost, who was sunning herself on the window sill, she squeezed her until the little cat uttered a plaintive “miaow” of remonstrance.

“Oh, Julia Frost, I didn’t mean to hurt you,” said Nancy, petting her, and soothing her injured feelings, “but I’ve just thought that I will have the scarf all ready, lying out on my bed, with the rose-colored silk under it, to show off its pattern, when I go down-stairs to the tea-drinking. And then, when grandfather and Dr. Halliday are talking together, I will ask Mrs. Carter to come up-stairs to see my room, and then she will discover the scarf. Won’t that be lovely, Julia?” and Nancy clasped her hands over the cat’s soft fur and squeezed her again, though not as hard as before.

Nancy chose to wear what Aunt Sylvia had always called her “dressing” delaine that afternoon; Nancy



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had never understood the name, but Aunt Sylvia had always assured her that "dressing" was what her mother had called it. There were little posies scattered over the white ground, and the posies were tied with blue bows and long fluttering ends ; both the flowers and the ribbons had faded, but Nancy had always loved the little dress.

"'Pears like it cyant fade no mo', " Aunt Sylvia remarked, as she hooked it up Nancy's straight slender back that afternoon. " Cyant you rec'llect, honey, how when I fust made dat dress ober fo' you, dose posies jess fla'nted dereselves, dey was so bright an' pinky, an' dose knots an' ends was de bluest blue dat ebber I see. But it's a dressing pattern jess de same, an' dat's always fash'nable, 'kase dere's de dressing shepherdresses ebery time when dere's a county ball, to dis day, 'sides dose dat folkses keep on dere mantelpieces fo' show-off ornaments."

It seemed as if the hour for the tea-drinking would never come ; Nancy looked out of the windows, first one, then another ; she poked the fire, rearranged the sofa-cushions, sat in one chair after another, while the Admiral dozed by the fire ; every few minutes she tiptoed out into the hall, where the old clock ticked solemnly on.



"You never were so slow before," said Nancy to the clock, "but the time is going, in spite of you."

At last, far down the road she heard the jingle of bells, coming nearer and nearer; up the driveway came the two coal-black horses, their trappings shining like silver, while on the front seat of the sleigh they drew sat two men, with ruddy, inexpressive faces, who were dressed exactly alike in plum-colored livery with shining silver buttons, and great fur collars. One of these men held the reins, while the other sat with folded arms. Behind them Nancy saw the big black hat with its nodding plumes, and a soft fur cap on a white head beside it.

"Grandfather," said Nancy, at the Admiral's elbow, "grandfather, the company is just arriving."

She was about to start for the door when Aunt Sylvia, in an apron so starched that it crackled with each step she took, marched along the hall.

"Keep back in de room, honey," she commanded in a whisper, "and be standing up, kind ob easy an' yet cordial, when I ushers in de comp'ny."

The Admiral rose with Nancy's help, but as his stick had slipped from his hand, to fall under the table, Nancy was on the floor, picking it up, instead of standing with an easy and yet cordial air, when Aunt Sylvia's



voice, raised till it was almost like a trumpet, announced the visitors.

“Mis’ Cyarter an’ Dr. Halliday to see Admiral Beaumont an’ Miss Nancy Beaumont,” pealed Aunt Sylvia, and she waved the guests in, making such a courtesy as only she knew how to make.

The Admiral was charmed with Mrs. Carter—Nancy saw that at once, with great delight, and yet with amazement, for surely no Beaumont lady ever greeted a stranger with such an air of gay comradeship as this ! It was quite different from Mrs. Compton’s gentle sweetness ; the Admiral had been courteous and gallant to her, but his eyes had not been lighted by the gleams of amusement which this fearless visitor had called forth.

Dr. Halliday was a fine-looking man of sixty, with wonderful eyes which were sometimes blue and sometimes black ; he had a quick, decisive way of speaking which Nancy admired, and the Admiral treated him with great respect, as a person who had achieved much in the professional world.

Tea was served in a few moments, brought in by Aunt Sylvia on the big tray while Betty followed with a smaller tray on which were three plates—one of scones, one of frosted pound-cakes, and one of butter-nut surprise.



It was when the doctor caught sight of this last plate that he gave an exclamation of delight.

“I declare this is a treat,” he said as Betty, her hands scrubbed until they were bright pink to the very finger-tips, passed him the plate. “My boy brought home some of this from school a few days ago ; he got it at a little new shop which has been started in the neighborhood, and is much patronized by the children. He would only spare his mother and me one good-sized piece between us.”

“I don’t believe it could have been exactly like this, Dr. Halliday,” said Nancy, fearful of Aunt Sylvia’s disappointment. “At least, this is an old recipe and we thought nobody else had it.”

“It’s precisely the same, I should say,” the doctor announced after a critical taste of the candy.

“We—at least Aunt Sylvia and I—have always called it ‘butt’nut s’prise,’ ” said Nancy. “Probably she’s told other people how to make it, some time ; she invented it, Dr. Halliday, years ago.”

“What did you call her ?” asked the doctor, his eyes keen and interested, as he glanced at the door through which Aunt Sylvia had vanished. The Admiral and Mrs. Carter were talking, not listening to the others.

“Aunt Sylvia,” repeated Nancy, softly, though she



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could not have told why. "She is my dear old mammy, who does everything for me; and she loved my mother, too."

"Ah!" said the doctor; he leaned over toward Nancy as he took a second piece of the candy at her urgent request. "That's rather a curious coincidence, Miss Nancy. The little place I spoke of, which is a private venture of half a dozen ladies, I'm told, which has various home-made delicacies, is named for one of the principal consigners, I believe, and she is an Aunt—Somebody; it is called 'Aunt—Somebody's—Shop.' It almost might be Aunt Sylvia, as I recall the children's talk, when I've seen two or three of them munching goodies. It seems there's a peculiar sort of buns to be had there, which they consider far superior to any other."

Nancy looked at him, wide-eyed.

"Not walnut buns!" she breathed; "it couldn't be!"

The doctor nodded.

"That's it," he said in a low tone. "What's going on here, Miss Nancy? Some kind of witch-work?"

Nancy locked her fingers together, and tried to keep still.

"How could it be?" she asked. "You live way off in the city, where the Comptons do."



"Why, Mrs. Compton is on two or three boards with my wife," said the doctor. "A sweet little woman, and I'm glad you know her. But the city isn't so far off as it might be. Why, they tell me there's an express that goes through here some time in the early morning that reaches us in a few hours. You're remembering that wonderful ride of yours in the freight car; your friend Mrs. Potter told me about it, yesterday. That was rather slow travel."

"Dr. Halliday," said Nancy, "would you just as soon not tell grandfather about that shop? Oh, you don't understand," and she put her hand with a quick gesture on his arm, as his expression changed; "it—it's only to save grandfather's pride—not dear Aunt Sylvia. I can see everything now—all at once!"

Mrs. Carter had told her uncle what she knew and also what she suspected of the state of the old Admiral's finances. And now, as he looked at Nancy in her little faded delaine, his quick brain jumped to the right conclusion. He took Nancy's hand, and held it for a moment in a strong clasp.

"You may trust me," he said gravely.

"Is this a compact of friendship, or what is it?" demanded Mrs. Carter's gay voice, as she turned and saw the clasped hands.



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"It is exactly that, and I'm proud to make it," said Dr. Halliday, releasing Nancy's hand.

"Then if it is formally witnessed, won't you take me up to show me your room, as you promised, before we go home?" Mrs. Carter asked the little girl. "I am afraid we are staying too long," she said with a mischievous side glance at the Admiral.

"That would be quite impossible," returned the Admiral gallantly, and Mrs. Carter swept a low courtesy, quite different from Aunt Sylvia's, but made with her own special grace.

"Some day, perhaps you would like to see the whole house," said Nancy, "but to-day I just want to show you my room. Don't you—do you think it is pretty? I had to shut the door to keep Julia Frost out—because—— Oh," said Nancy, with a child's eagerness in her voice, "will you please look at what's on the bed before you look at anything else!"



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE SECRET IS OUT

It was nearly half an hour later when Mrs. Carter and Nancy went down the stairs together. Nancy's cheeks were flushed and her eyes looked as if there might have been tears in them not long before, but her soft lips were curved in a smile, and Mrs. Carter's arm was around her as they descended the stairs.

"Now remember," she said, as they reached the hall, "don't you be one bit frightened, and don't say anything until you have to, Nancy. If I can't make the Admiral see things a little my way, I shall consider myself a perfect failure—and it will be the first time in my life I've ever been really humble," she whispered in Nancy's ear, as they were about to enter the library; "perhaps I need a lesson, but I don't believe this is the right time for it!"

The Admiral and Dr. Halliday were so deeply engaged in conversation that they did not hear the entering footsteps.

"No, sir," the Admiral was saying to the physician as Mrs. Carter and Nancy crossed the threshold, "I



do not wish to sell one foot of my land to the mill people ; it's their work, it's their sordid manufacturing element that has changed the town—ruined it, to my mind."

Then he saw Mrs. Carter, and suddenly realized that the wife of a man closely connected with the "sordid manufacturing element" might, quite naturally, take offense at his words—yet he could not retract them. He looked at her regretfully, but there was no regret on Mrs. Carter's charming face as she stepped close to him, and smiled mischievously.

"I can't have you calling my husband sordid," she said, "because he isn't, Admiral Beaumont. I shall bring him out here and let him talk to you about his collection of Napoleonica, and his extended Thackeray and Washington Irving—then you'll see."

She spoke with pretty defiance, but the Admiral answered her quickly ; it seemed as if they both forgot the listeners.

"Your husband has money, and you have more," said the Admiral ; "why should he turn himself into a business drudge, in work which has no glory, or power for good, no influence on the country—for the sake of making more money ?"

The black hat was tilted at a sharper angle, and



the face beneath its shade wore a look of mingled indignation and amazement for a moment, then Mrs. Carter smiled again.

“Dear Admiral Beaumont,” she said, “you’ve never been near the mills. I know it by the way you talk. Some day when you are feeling just like it, I will drive out here for you, and take you down to a place I love, where you can hear the rushing of the water that turns the great wheels, and then you’ll shut your eyes and think of the cotton that’s being woven—the great sheets and bales to be made later into bedding and clothes for our soldiers and sailors—the men that protect us on land and sea. You’ll love the sound of it.”

The Admiral looked at her blankly for a moment, and while he looked, Mrs. Carter pressed her advantage.

“I know just how it is,” she said, nodding her head wisely; “you’ve never thought about that part of it. You’d rather have all the nice people in this world adopt professions; that’s exactly the way my father felt until I convinced him how much more worth while it is to be a good business man than a poor lawyer or physician; of course for the army and navy one must have a special bent, to be successful,” and she swept a courtesy to the Admiral with her hand on her heart.



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"I never thought of it in that way," said the Admiral, a glint of amusement in his eyes.

"I knew you never had," said his guest in a tone of triumph. "But now you'll think of it, and there's another thing—I have no respect whatever for people who aren't willing to earn money—not a particle. My father had to let me go to a dressmaking and millinery class, and then he had to let me make some hats and send them to the Woman's Exchange—just to see if I was worth my salt—and they sold, Admiral Beaumont—they sold for ten dollars apiece, and I gave the money to father's pet charity—and he was prouder of me than ever before or since."

"Dear me, you're a very talented young woman, I'm sure," said the Admiral, the amusement still in his eyes.

"All my friends did it," said Mrs. Carter, "and two or three of my best friends, who don't happen to be rich, or even comfortably off, make hats for the rest of us still; and we're so glad to give them what their skill deserves, instead of paying it to some shopkeeper who has enough customers without us. You see it's coöperation, Admiral; they give us what we need—and we give them what they need—only of course skill and taste are much more valuable than money—so we get the best of every bargain."



"I see," said the Admiral. "Your reasoning is extremely clear."

"I'm glad you'd admit it," said Mrs. Carter, "and by the way, I want to show you something—both you gentlemen, and Nancy, I think, may like to look at it again, though I've shown it to her before."

Nancy's breath came fast, as Mrs. Carter unrolled the rose-colored silk, and displayed the beautiful scarf.

"I want you to look at this, please, carefully, with your very best eyesight," said Mrs. Carter, "and tell me, if you can, where it has been mended. There was a great, jagged tear in it, and a friend of mine has repaired it so that I may wear it again. Please find the mended place—if you can."

The two men held the scarf obediently, and searched its length for the place where the jagged tear had been.

"We'd better take it close to the window," said Dr. Halliday after a few moments; "let us get all the light we can on the matter."

It seemed to Nancy as if she scarcely drew a breath until they came back, shaking their heads. The Admiral returned the scarf to Mrs. Carter with a courtly bow.

"That must be a very wonderful piece of work on a scarf which I judge to be almost priceless," he said.



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"If my wife were here she would be able to appreciate it as it deserves. She was a great lover of beautiful lace, and skilled in mending it, as well. If she had lived, little Nancy would have had the same talent well developed," he added, looking regretfully at his granddaughter.

"Now what should you say if I told you that the person who mended this scarf hesitated about accepting the money for her work?" said Mrs. Carter, looking at the two gentlemen with uplifted brows. "Don't you think it would be very ungenerous to leave me with such a weight of obligation? She might use the money for any purpose she liked—that would be no concern of mine."

"I should be inclined to tell her I would never wear the scarf until she had let me pay for it," said Dr. Halliday. "She must be rather an ungenerous person."

"Oh, no, she isn't!" said Mrs. Carter; "she is quite the opposite."

"Can't you present the matter to her in such a light that she will see your position?" asked the Admiral in his most judicial tone. "Can't you tell her that it will make you unhappy to accept such a gift and be unable to make the least return? Could you not suggest that she might appropriately purchase



something by which to remember her friendly, exquisite work and your gratitude?"

"Admiral Beaumont, I believe you have hit on the very thing I can do," said Mrs. Carter.

She turned to Nancy, and laid her hand on the little girl's arm.

"You have heard him, Nancy," she said, "you have heard the Admiral. Now will you do as he suggests, dear, and please me? Will you take this," and she thrust a little blue slip of paper, folded twice, into Nancy's hand, "and use it in some way to remember your friendly, exquisite work and my gratitude, as your grandfather has said?"

"Oh, thank you! Oh, may I, grandfather?" and she looked at the Admiral as if there were no one else in the room.

The Admiral stared down at her, uncomprehending, and incredulous.

"You," he said in a wondering voice; "you—little Nancy! You can't be the one about whom she was talking! You could never have done that work."

"Yes, grandfather," said Nancy, going close to him, still with the air of seeing no one else in the room. "It is lovely work to do; you know grandmother began to teach me, and then Aunt Sylvia taught me all she knew



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and—and perhaps I inherited some of it from my Beaumont ancestors, grandfather, for it is so easy—you can't think how easy it is, and how I love to do it!”

The Admiral stood silent, holding the little hand she had slipped into his, looking down at it. Then he took his other hand and spread Nancy's fingers on his palm, regarding them as if they were wonderful things which he had never seen before. The little blue paper fluttered unnoticed to the floor.

“And you would be glad to get something for a remembrance of the work and the friend for whom you did it?” questioned the Admiral. “Perhaps when you go to the city to pay your visit, you would like to buy something. You see money is a matter of small consequence to Mrs. Carter, my dear; you need not feel overburdened, I am sure, by her kindness,” and he spoke with his grandest air.

Mrs. Carter stooped and picked up the little blue slip.

“Here it is,” she said, holding it out to Nancy, “and with Aunt Sylvia to help you, it will do such wonderful things, I shall feel beautifully remembered for a long time.”

“Aunt Sylvia,” echoed Dr. Halliday. “By the way, I wonder if I might have a word with her before I go,



Miss Nancy? There's something I'd like to ask her, about buns and ——"

He stopped abruptly, for into the room marched Aunt Sylvia, her head up in the air, and a gleam in her eyes such as the Admiral had not seen for many a year—not since the days when she had protected Nancy's father in his little boyhood—it was the light of battle.

"What is it you wants to ax me?" she asked, stopping in the middle of the floor, her eyes riveted on Dr. Halliday.

"Aunt Sylvia!" said the Admiral sternly, but she paid not the slightest heed.

"If you's gwine ax me 'bout dose buns, an' frosted cookies an' butt'nut s'prise an' anyt'ing else, you needn't," said Aunt Sylvia, her voice high and strained with excitement. "I knowed when you said de fust words dat I couldn't keep my secret no longer, an' I don' need to—for I isn't 'shamed—no, sah. I's proud ob what I's done."

"What is all this about?" demanded the Admiral.

Every one save the doctor waited anxiously for Aunt Sylvia's reply; he was quite sure, by that time, what she had to tell.

"All you t'inks about is yo' pride o' race," said Aunt Sylvia, turning on the Admiral a face blazing with



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wrath; "acres an' acres ob land"—she stretched her arms wide—"an' not one ob 'em sold so my little Miss Nancy can hab de visitings an' educations dat b'longs to a Beaumont lady. Not one acre!" and she let her arms fall.

"But dere's folks dat's brack as coals an' doesn't know nuffin' but cooking an' housework, dat can help her get what b'longs to her! 'Most ebery day since Mis' Gen'l Compton went back to de city I's got up at two o'clock in de mo'ning, an' I's cooked an' cooked—an' I's riz dat 'Vanus out o' his baid, an' he is borrowed my little Miss Nancy's mare, an' tooken all dose cookings ob mine in a pastebo'd box and strop dat box on Jessie's back, and ride her careful down to de Potterville station fo' to cotch de five-thutty train. An' Mis' Gen'l Compton an' some lady friends ob hers, dey's named a little shop whar folkkses send t'ings to eat, 'Aunt Sylvia's Shop'—yes, sah, 'kase dey likes my cookings, I s'pose.

"An' I's 'arned a pile ob money already, an' dat 'Vanus is helped out too, all ob his own wishes, by doing work fo' Mr. Libery Stable Hobbs while he waits fo' de mail. An' Mr. Lord at de station he's kep' de secret, an' Mr. Libery Stable Hobbs is kept it, an' 'Vanus is kept it, too—an' Mis' Gen'l Compton.



“But dis mo’ning,”—the blazing wrath died from the old black face, and Aunt Sylvia drooped—“suddenly, dis mo’ning, I knew we couldn’t keep it no longer; fo’ dat ’Vanus, he done slip down on de railroad tracks, and he twis’ his knee j’int s cl’ar round, an’ scrape de skin off his ankle bones, an’ hit his haid too; an’ he had to wait at de station to c’llect his senses an’ get his pore j’int s into place, an’ de whole ob Potterville, including Mis’ Potter, cotched sight ob him.

“So den I knew I’d hab to tell, an’ when dis gen’leman came from de city knowing ’bout de shop, I knew I’d got to tell quick. But I isn’t ’shamed,” said Aunt Sylvia, “an’ dat is all I got to say.”

“Aunt Sylvia,” said Dr. Halliday, in his crispest tone, “if you could see that sign, gold letters on a bright red ground, and see the school children crowd into the shop, you’d be so proud you could hardly contain yourself!”

Nancy had run to her old mammy, for Aunt Sylvia looked as if she might drop to the floor. She turned to Dr. Halliday, her lips working tremulously.

“Does—does de sign swing, or do it hang up stiff?” she asked, as she felt Nancy’s hand on her arm.

“It swings,” said Dr. Halliday; “it swings glori-



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ously when the wind blows. I've heard the children tell of it."

"I devised Mis' Gen'l Compton to hab it swing," said Aunt Sylvia; "chillun loves to hab t'ings like dat," and she moved toward the door. "T'ank you, sah."

She had not looked again at the Admiral, who was sitting, his head sunk on his hand. But when she reached the door, she turned and went back to him with surprising swiftness.

"Adm'ral," she faltered, "kin you forgib me fo' saying what's true, when I didn't hab de rights to say it? I's served you faithful, an' I'll serve you still, long's I lib—but—but I's got to speak de truf out once in a while."

And then something happened which had not happened since a day, years before, when Nancy's father had been spared injustice by Aunt Sylvia's wrathful intervention—the Admiral held out his hand for the old mammy to grasp.

There passed no word between them, and Aunt Sylvia stepped softly from the room, courtesying to the company when she reached the door. The Admiral roused himself—the good-byes were said; the sleigh with its clean-stepping horses, its jingling bells, and its two stolid men, was summoned to the door.



“Will you tell your husband that he will receive a reply to the letter he sent me in a day or two?” said the Admiral as he held Mrs. Carter’s hand to say his last words; “and I hope this visit is but the first of many.”

As the sleigh jingled down the road Mrs. Carter turned to her uncle, her manner unusually subdued, and her eyes pensive.

“I feel as if I had taken a good deal more excitement than is usually served with afternoon tea,” she said softly, “and you look as if you felt the same way. But I wouldn’t have missed it for anything—would you?”

“Not I,” said Dr. Halliday. “It’s the only afternoon tea I ever attended that was a perfect success, to my mind.”



## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE ADMIRAL'S ACRES

THAT was a strange evening for Nancy and the Admiral; when the little girl turned from the door to go back to the library she dreaded to face her grandfather; but nothing was said of what had happened, any more than if it had not happened at all. The Admiral requested Nancy to set out the chess-board on its little table, and until supper time he drilled her, severely, on his favorite game.

Supper was a sober meal; Nancy tried in vain to think of things to say which were not connected with their late guests, the town affairs, the Comptons, Aunt Sylvia, or Sylvanus—it seemed as if every topic led, directly or indirectly, to one of these dangerous pitfalls of conversation.

“Do you think the stars will be out to-night, grandfather?” she asked, desperately, at last, when the silence seemed to vibrate in her ears.

The Admiral looked across the table at her, as if he had just recalled her existence.



"What did you say?" he asked, and Nancy quavered forth her question for the second time.

The Admiral gave a grim smile.

"What is there to keep them in, Nancy?" he asked, and then something in the wistful little face made him relent. "Don't try to entertain me, child," he said, not ungently. "I have a great deal to think over. I shall be ready to talk to-morrow, no doubt, and to listen."

There was a short evening, spent with the chess-board, and Nancy was glad when her grandfather swept the pieces from it, and told her to go to bed. She did not quite dare beg him to go early to bed himself, though he kissed her good-night, and held her face between his palms for a moment, gazing earnestly at it, as if he were trying to read in it something he had never seen before.

When Nancy went up-stairs to her room, she found Aunt Sylvia sitting there in the dark, rocking to and fro.

"I's resting my bones," she said as Nancy's candle showed her, a weary old figure, but with a peaceful face. "I's done rub dat 'Vanus boy from his haid to his feet; 'most a quart ob lin'ment an' water, I reckon, I's used up on him; he was a pit'ful sight, my lamb,



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so he was. You looked like a posey you'self in dat dressing delainey, honey. Come hyah, an' I'll unhook it."

"Aunt Sylvia," said Nancy, as she sat down in her old mammy's lap, with her back to the willing hands, "Mrs. Carter called this a Dresden dress; there is a city in Germany called Dresden, where she has been, and she says they make beautiful china and all sorts of things, with roses and other flowers tied with ribbon knots, just like the pattern of my dress; so I think perhaps we've made a little mistake in the name, don't you?"

Aunt Sylvia unfastened the last hook before she answered, and her voice was cool and decided when she spoke.

"Yo' lady mother call dat pattern de 'dressing' pattern," she said, "an' I calls it de dressing pattern 'kase ob dat reason, honey. If you wants to call it some new-fangled name, Aunt Sylvia hasn't nuffin' mo' to say 'bout it."

"I shall call it a dressing pattern, myself," said Nancy warmly, for she saw that the mistake her mammy's ears had made so long ago was fixed and dear to her now. "I think it is a prettier name than Dresden, whether it's right or not. Oh, Aunt Sylvia,



I wish you might have seen Mrs. Carter's scarf, that I mended for her. There were so many things happening, that I forgot to ask Mrs. Carter to let you see it, and my work. It had to be a secret—but now I'll tell you all about it."

Aunt Sylvia listened silently, smoothing Nancy's curls, but when the story was over she spoke.

"I saw dat scyarf," she said slowly. "When I made up my min' to tell what I'd been doing, befo' de comp'ny went off, I jess stepped up-stairs, honey, to sit down in yo' room a minute, an'—an' kind ob put some heart an' courage into me. 'Twas jess befo' you brung Mis' Cyater up hyah to see it. Dat was a beautiful piece ob mending, my lamb."

"Could you see where the tear had been, Aunt Sylvia?" asked Nancy; "of course you could."

"I didn' take dat scyarf up into my hands," said Aunt Sylvia, "but I put on my glasses, an' I s'arch it pretty thorough whar it lay, 'kase I 'maged what you'd been doing—an' I couldn't see de leastest speck ob evidences ob a mending place in dat scyarf; no, honey, true an' honest, I couldn't."

There fell a silence between them, but when Nancy was in bed she drew her mammy's face down close to hers.



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"Oh, Aunt Sylvia," she said, with a little catch in her breath, "oh, Aunt Sylvia, how can I ever thank you—and Sylvanus?"

"'Tisn't no case fo' t'anks, my lamb," said Aunt Sylvia, as she brought the coverlet up and tucked it under Nancy's chin. "Now I's told 'bout it, an' don't hab to be workin' in de dark and cold no mo', 'twill be jess play to me—an' you can beat up some aigs fo' de cakes now an' den; 'pears like my elbows ain' what dey use to be—dey refuses to work quick like elbows ought to work. I's gettin' rich, honey—rich enough so you kin go to de city dis spring an' hab some educations 'longside ob Miss Marg'rite."

"And what will you do while I'm away, if I go?" asked Nancy.

"Me?" Aunt Sylvia straightened her back and laughed. "Why, I'll hab de easies' time ob my life, honey, no hair to bresh, no dresses to hook up, no mending to do, no—don' you ax me how I's gwine get on, honey," said Aunt Sylvia fiercely—"I is gwine get on, dat's all!"

The next morning when Nancy was dressed, she put on her red cape, and ran out to the barn. The horses had not enjoyed any "frisky time" that morning. Sylvanus was limping about, feeding them, and setting



things in order. Nancy walked straight up to him and held out her hand.

"Sylvanus, will you excuse me for being provoked with you, yesterday, about Jessie?" she said, looking up at him; "and I am so sorry you were hurt, and so much obliged for all you've done. You must take a good rest now. I will help Aunt Sylvia, and so will Betty—if grandfather says we may keep on with it—and you can drive down, instead of having to ride. Aunt Sylvia says everything except the buns can be made in the afternoon, and the buns she'll have to give up, she thinks. You've been so good, Sylvanus."

"Miss Nancy," said the tall darkey, after a respectful shake of Nancy's little hand, "I was most gratified to give my contributings of time and energies in your service, and it has been a real beneficiary to me in the matter of early rising. I might say, Miss Nancy, that the habit I have formed in your behalfs has become almost agreeable and natural to me. And as for my instructings and light labor in Mr. Hobbs's stable, why——" Sylvanus lifted his eyebrows, and waved his arm with what would have been an airy gesture if the motion had not made him wince with pain.

"I hurried off somewhat more in haste than usual," he said when Nancy, full of sympathy, asked about



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his fall, "and as I was hurrying back across the rails, the whole world seemed to rise itself into my countenance—and there I was, Miss Nancy, proned upon the tracks! My mother has her opinions that it was a temporal faintness from lack of a morning meal."

"That must have been it," said Nancy. "It's a shame, Sylvanus! And you, dear, you helped, too," she said to the mare, whose head had been turned toward her, waiting for her greeting. "I'm so grateful to you all. Aren't you proud of your niece?" she asked Mary Anne, who looked satisfied, to say the least. "And Ezra, too? For we're all one family."

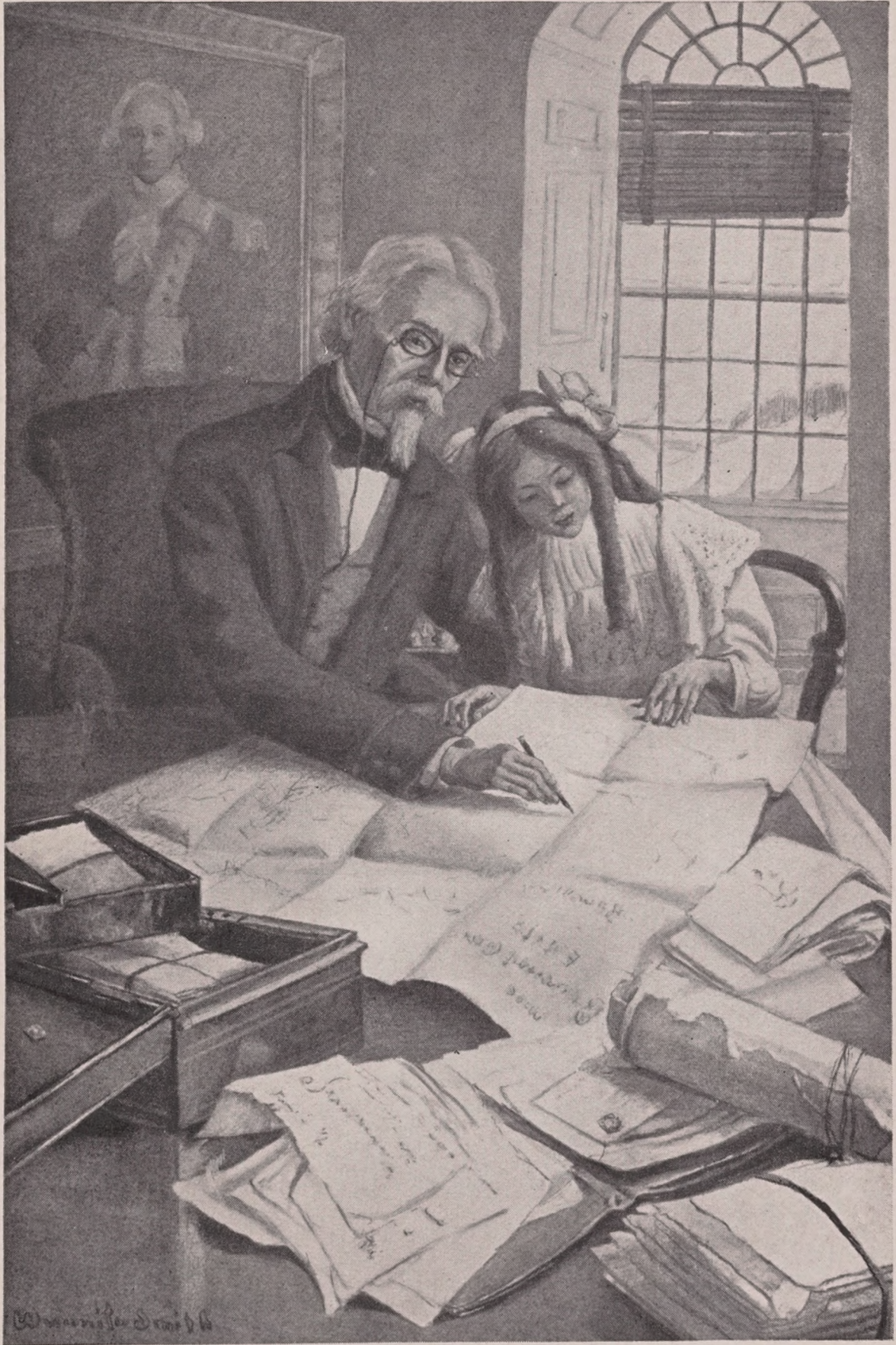
"Ezra would have taken me if he could," said Sylvanus, who had a soft spot in his heart for the old horse.

"Of course he would," said Nancy. "I haven't said half I mean, Sylvanus," she added, "but you know how I feel, I'm sure. Now I must go in to breakfast."

Her grandfather did not look as if he had slept at all, but it seemed to Nancy that he had never been so gentle to her before, not even when he welcomed her back after her ride in the freight car.

"After breakfast, my dear," he said to her, "I want to have a long talk with you—and to ask your advice about certain important matters."





THE SUN WAS STREAMING INTO THE LIBRARY







Nancy's heart beat fast, but she tried to eat her breakfast quietly, and after it, wait until her grandfather was ready to talk. He called to her at last; as long as she might live, Nancy would never forget that morning. The sun was streaming into the library, falling on the old chairs and lounges, showing all their shabbiness; passing through a many-sided glass paper-weight on a small stand, it lay on the big table at which the Admiral sat, making spots of vivid color—rose and violet and gold, all the rainbow tints—on the papers which were spread before him.

The Admiral began to talk quietly, and Nancy listened, sitting close beside him in the small chair he had drawn up to his big one.

"Dr. Halliday tells me, what General Compton has told me before, and written me," said the Admiral; "he says that you ought not to spend the year round in this house—and that if I were to go to the city, there is a sort of electrical treatment which would greatly help my rheumatism. So I've been thinking what we could do."

"But, grandfather, what do they mean about the house?" asked Nancy in bewilderment. "I love every bit of it! I don't see how there could be a better place in the world!"



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The Admiral looked at her keenly, and yet sadly.

"That's the way it has seemed to me, my dear," he said, "but they tell me you ought to be where there are other young people, and where you can see different things. I am old—but you are young. I've been thinking what we could do, Nancy. There's very little money—but a way has been opened to get a large sum, and now that the minds of all in the household are turned to making money, mine has turned too."

His words had a little sound of bitterness, but there was nothing bitter in the Admiral's face as he looked at Nancy. He laid one of his hands over hers, as she was about to speak.

"We won't go over any of the troubles of yesterday again, Nancy," he said, with a half smile at the little girl. "I've learned my lesson, I think. I had been fancying that things were as they used to be in the days when I was a boy. I had thought of you as the little chatelaine of our old house—and so you are—but you must not be a lonely or an ignorant little chatelaine, Nancy—we can't have that—for the honor of the name," and he raised his eyes to the portrait of a courtly ancestor of whom Nancy had heard many brave stories.



"The mill people wish to buy the parcel of land known as Broad Brook Meadows," the Admiral went on, more cheerfully. "See, here it is, Nancy, on this map of the estate. I don't suppose I've seen it for ten years—but I used to fish there; there are no such trout now as I used to catch."

Nancy looked at the name on the old map; she knew the place well, but it was not one of her special delights; the brook was not her favorite brook, and she knew it was not Jack's favorite either. She said so, not realizing that she spoke aloud.

"That's good," said the Admiral in a persistently cheerful voice. "It's a good many acres of land, Nancy, and they offer me several thousand dollars for it, so I think I will sell it to them at once—and then we can make our plans for going to the city—the sooner the better. I wrote a letter to General Compton last night, and asked him to find a place for us to live in for three or four months."

Nancy's brain was in a whirl; she could not think clearly. "Grandfather," she said at last, trembling with eagerness, "do you want to go? and what will become of Aunt Sylvia and Betty and Sylvanus, and Jessie and ——"

"Those last questions we shall have to discuss at



length," said the Admiral, "but there must be some way in which they can all be arranged satisfactorily. Of course Aunt Sylvia must go with us—it would break her heart to be separated from you, I really believe—and Jessie ought to go, I suppose, to prevent your heart from breaking."

He smiled at her so kindly that Nancy had the courage to speak of an idea which had popped into her head.

"If Jack could come for a day or two, if we could take a holiday time," she ventured, "he might ride with Jessie, grandfather, from here to the city, in that same freight car. Mr. Lord told me we could have it again, if we ever needed it."

"That's not a bad idea," said the Admiral; "or better still, he might take her in the freight car to the Junction and ride her the rest of the way. He'd enjoy that. Then you and Miss Marguerite could ride together in that Park they so often mention. Dr. Halliday says it is one of the best sorts of exercise for you."

"And about Aunt Sylvia's shop, grandfather?" asked Nancy in a very small voice.

"She didn't look to me as if she intended to give up that source of pride," said the Admiral grimly. "Ar-



range that as best you can, my dear. And now go and amuse yourself; we'll have no lessons this morning. Tell Aunt Sylvia the news, and in an hour send her to me. My letters will be done by that time."

"I think perhaps grandfather doesn't mind going," said Nancy, when she had poured out her surprising news to Aunt Sylvia, "for you see his rheumatism will be helped, and he'll have so much time with the General."

"M-m," said Aunt Sylvia. "Dat mought be so, my lamb."

But when at the end of 'an hour she walked into the library, she found what she had expected—an old man looking with sad, tired eyes at the map, his finger resting on the spot marked in red ink, "Broad Brook Meadows."

Aunt Sylvia walked to the table, and stood before him, her arms akimbo, as she had stood many times in her younger days.

"Don' you look like dat, Adm'ral!" she besought him; "you look up hyah, an' talk to me like I deserves fo' my upsushness—an' you'll feel bettah. Tell me I's a contraptious ole woman, an' ease yo' heart—'kase if you don't, I's gwine bust right out cryin', an' den whar'll you be?"



## CHAPTER XIX

### A JOURNEY BEGUN

"IT beats all, the way things have fitted in right for the Beaumont Corners family, doesn't it?" Mrs. Potter said importantly to Mrs. Carter who stopped at her door a week later, in response to a frantically beckoning hand. "I understand you're going to take their Betty and train her. Mr. Potter brought home that news last night. I don't recall where he heard it."

"Yes, I'm to have Betty," said Mrs. Carter, "and I consider myself very fortunate. My own maid wishes to go home to her people for three or four months, as there is illness in the family."

"Of course Betty isn't what you've been used to," said Mrs. Potter; "she's sort of clumsy, to my mind, but she's willing. Did you know 'Vanus is going to have our shed-chamber, and help Mr. Hobbs, and have those other two horses there?"

"Ezra and Mary Anne? Yes, I'd heard," laughed Mrs. Carter. "Think of Jessie in the freight car."

"You wait till you see it," said Mrs. Potter; "it's no ordinary car; of course I'm not saying it's quite up to one



of those new drawing-room cars such as you read of, but it's a real credit to Potterville folks—I will say that.”

“Mr. Lord showed it to me yesterday,” said Mrs. Carter, “and he told me about Sylvanus and the early morning express trains; it was really exciting to hear him describe it—the great rushing train coming through the darkness, slowing up just a little, enough for Sylvanus to reach up to the expressman, and for the great pasteboard box to change hands. But how in the world Sylvanus managed to carry the box into town behind him, on Jessie’s back, I can’t see. Nancy says it wasn’t heavy, but it must have been cumbersome. He tried to explain to me how it was strapped on, and ‘most eventually safe, Mrs. Carter’—but I couldn’t really understand.”

“He explained the contrivance to me yesterday,” said Mrs. Potter, “and ’twas real clever, and safe so long as Jessie’s not given to stumbling; but I guess he finds a carriage is considerable easier. I feel differently toward him from what I always have till lately; as my husband says, supposing he does try to use high-flown language, and get a word wrong here and there, ’tisn’t language we live by—’tis heart and actions, and his heart is certainly white as anybody’s,” said Mrs. Potter, becoming a little mixed, “and his actions have been



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what I call loyal. Of course, as Mr. Potter remarked, he won't ever be so very up-and-coming, but then most folks have their drawbacks."

"I suppose you'll be at the station to see them off day after to-morrow?" Mrs. Carter asked, and Mrs. Potter nodded.

"I wouldn't miss it for a good deal," she said. "I guess most of the town will be there, though they'll keep in the background a mite, on account of the Admiral's feelings—he don't like display; but we'll all show our interest, and Mr. Lord has a basket that's 'most full to the brim now of little things we've all contributed to make their journey pleasant; the train isn't exactly express—the one they're going on, but 'tis a pretty quick one. Mr. Jack doesn't start off in the freight car till an hour later. He asked me if I'd be there to 'press his hand and give him courage.' He's full of his jokes," and Mrs. Potter smiled tolerantly.

Two days later there were drawn up in front of the Beaumont house a low hung carriage on runners, into which Ezra was harnessed, and the old Beaumont sleigh to which Mary Anne was attached. There was also a pung in which were several trunks and boxes, with Johnny Kane to drive the livery stable horse. All the curtains were drawn down, on the ground floor of



the old house, but up-stairs the sun was to be allowed free entrance. Aunt Sylvia, her head enveloped in two veils, went from room to room to see if all was well.

Julia Frost was to accompany Nancy, in a box with peep-holes, made specially for her by Mr. Potter. Spick and Span had been taken to the Potter house, and were to earn their board by searching out some mice which had lately troubled the careful housekeeper.

“How they’ve got the best of me, I don’t know,” she said to Nancy when she bespoke the kittens, “but ’twon’t be for long!”

The rest of the live stock was to be looked after by one of the farmers who helped the Admiral at odd times by planting, ploughing and haying.

“I wish we could have taken two or three hens, so grandfather might have had fresh eggs every morning,” said Nancy regretfully, but Jack laughed and told her it would be difficult to accommodate hens in the cozy little apartment Mrs. Compton had secured for the Admiral’s household.

Nancy said “good-bye for a while” to all the rooms and took a special farewell of the clock in the hall.

“Jack has wound you so you will go for two weeks,” she said, “and after that you’d better take a good rest, you dear old thing, till we come home again.”



## 202 *The Admiral's Little Housekeeper*

At last the door opened, and out came the family. First the Admiral, leaning on Jack's arm, was escorted down the steps and into the carriage; then Nancy took her place by his side. Mr. Hobbs was to drive them. Then came Aunt Sylvia and Betty, whom Sylvanus was to drive in the old sleigh. Aunt Sylvia sat heavily down in her many wrappings, and fixed her gaze on the hills, her back turned to the old house. Betty was sniffing, but in her eyes there was the light of agreeable anticipation, for all their red lids.

Last of all came Jack, stepping briskly. He shut the big door with a clang, locked it, took out the key, and then gave the door a shake to make sure it was well fastened.

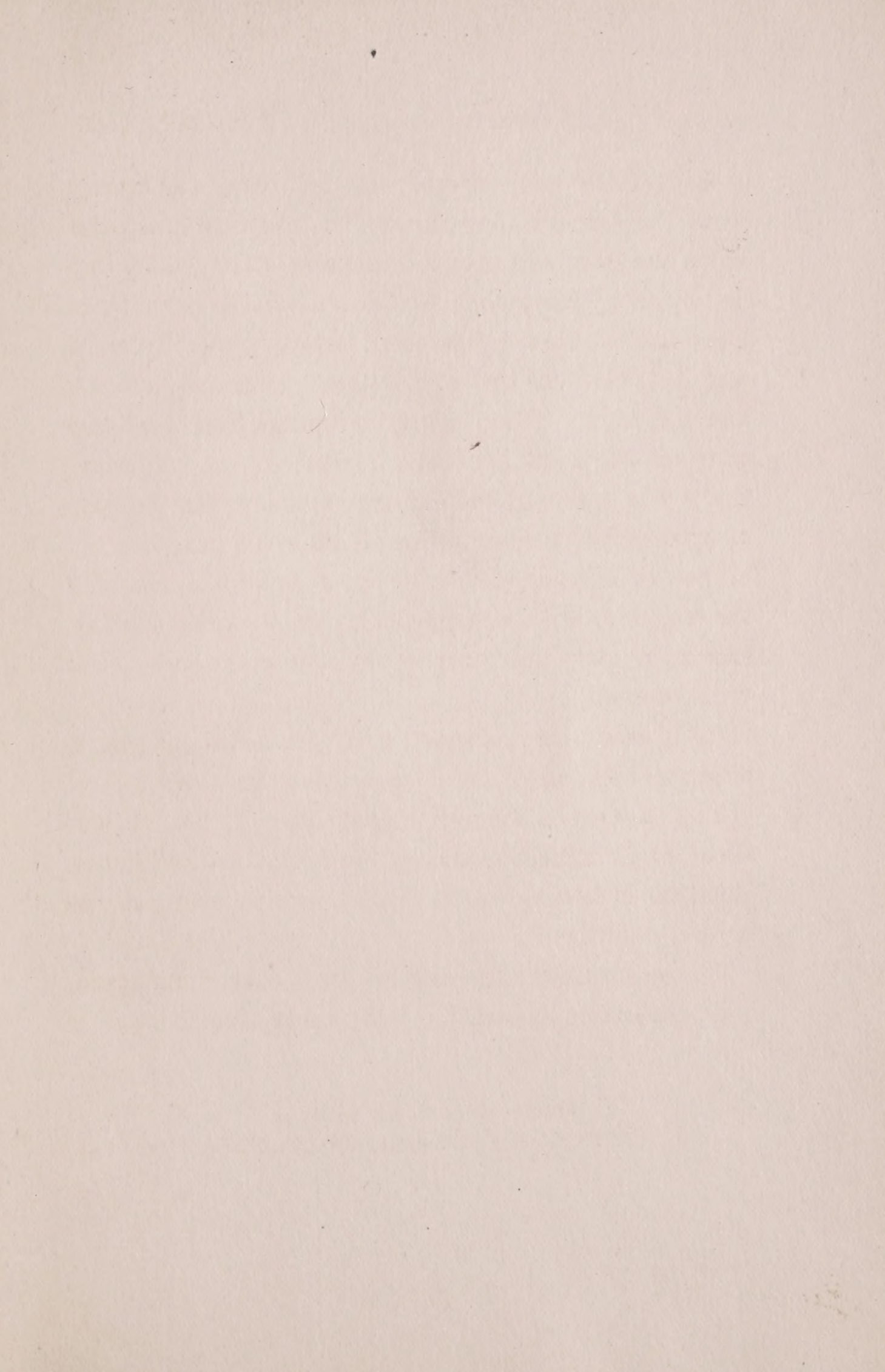
"All ready for the start, sir?" he asked his grandfather as he handed the old gentleman the key.

The Admiral's fingers closed over it, but he was silent for a moment, staring blindly at the old house. Then he looked down at Nancy, smiled, and put the key into her hand.

"Keep it safe till the day we come back home again, little chatelaine," he said. "All ready, Jack."

Another Story in this Series is:  
THE ADMIRAL'S GRANDDAUGHTER































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